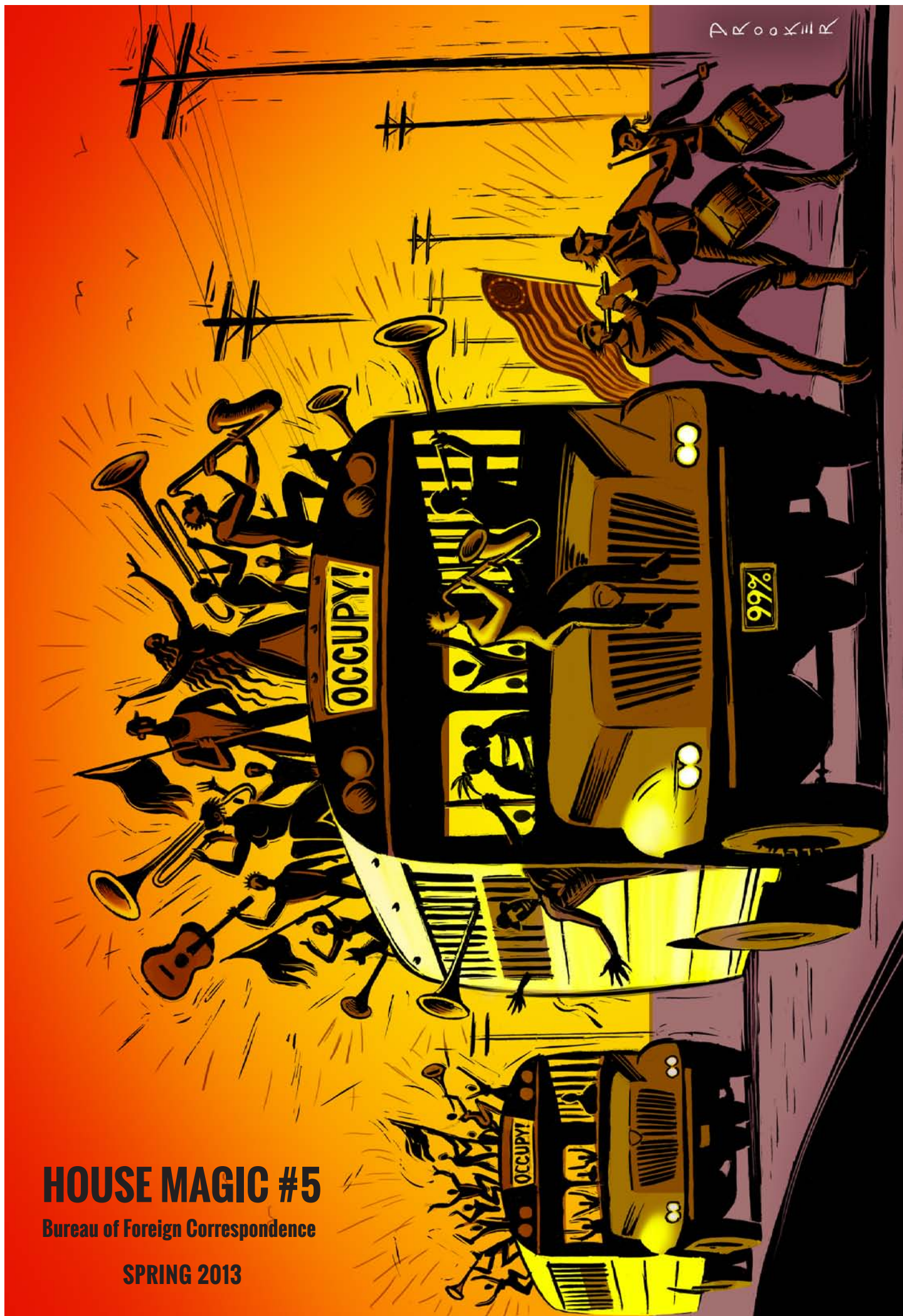


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HOUSE MAGIC #5

Bureau of Foreign Correspondence

SPRING 2013

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“House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence” is an information project about cultural and political squatting and occupation.

All zines and some project documentation online at:
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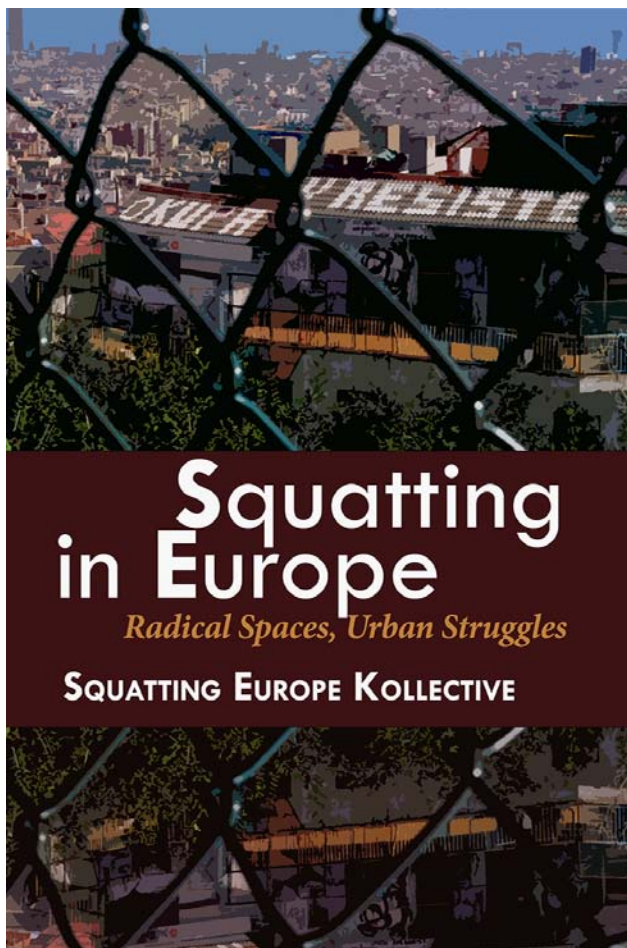
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Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles

edited by the Squatting Europe Kollektive

Includes: Preface by Margit Mayer; Introduction by Miguel Martínez, Gianni Piazza and Hans Pruijt; Squatting in Europe, by Hans Pruijt; Resisting and Challenging Neoliberalism, by Pierpaolo Mudu; How do activists make decisions within Social Centres?, by Gianni Piazza; The Squatters' Movement in Spain, by Miguel A. Martínez López; Urban squatting, rural squatting and the ecological-economic perspective, by Claudio Cattaneo; Squatting And Urban Renewal, by Andrej Holm and Armin Kuhn; Have squat, will travel, by Lynn Owens; Configurations of squats in Paris and the Ile-de-France Region, by Thomas Aguilera; What is a "good" squatter?, by Florence Bouillon; Moving towards criminalisation and then what?, by ETC Dee

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It's Not Only Gypsies and Punks Anymore...

by Alan W. Moore

During the five years that the House Magic project has been underway, both the popular and academic awareness of squatting and occupation has expanded dramatically. The tactic is no longer simply the mainstay of the socially marginal poor or defiantly minoritarian political gangs –what Marx once called the *Lumpenproletariat*. Since the “Arab Spring” began in Tunisia in late 2010, the 15M (for 15th of May, 2011) movement launched in Spain, and Occupy Wall Street kicked off in New York last October, encampment and occupation have become the regular tools of the new peoples’ movements. Throughout the U.S. and Spain, squatting and encampment as eviction defense have become widespread tactics to ameliorate the devastation of tenants wrought by the collapse of the economy and long-term shrinkage of public social housing.

As journalists, teachers, and artists of all kinds have been strongly impacted by the global economic crisis, the occupation meme has entered everyday life and speech. The collective experience of encampment has been emulated in art exhibitions as curators enlarge their purviews to include the emergent social movements.

This issue of “House Magic” also enlarges the scope of inquiry to include texts –again, most from the internet– on a variety of topics. First, texts about recent evictions, the near-inevitable corollary of squatting and occupation. In direct action, this is where the truncheon meets the skull. It’s also a significant public rhetorical front, since squatting projects define themselves through laments as they cease to exist. (Of course, the collectives that brought about those occupations usually continue, promoting new projects into being.) This section begins with a text by Miguel Martínez, the convener of the Squatting Europe Kollektive (SqEK) and a close collaborator with the evicted Casablanca social center in Lavapiés. He lays out the reasons why these squats should exist.

... occupied cinemas and theaters express culture as a common good

Next, a tiny part cut out from a brilliant article by Alberto Cor-sín Jiménez and Adolfo Estalella discusses the past history of squatting in Madrid’s Lavapiés district through a description of a “Jane’s Walk.” This perambulation, named for the famed urban activist and theorist Jane Jacobs, has become a bit of an international movement for urbanist geeks.

A text pirated from a mainstream news source bids farewell to Tacheles, Berlin’s long-lived art squat. The place began



Long Island Press.

when the Berlin Wall came down. Now that kind of demotic urban development is obsolete in the increasingly glittering capital city of Germany, and artists must buy their spots. Not all of these new proprietors, we may imagine, will be “poor but sexy” (the words of Berlin’s mayor about his city). Another text tells of the “Sabotaj,” an occupation of a location slated for a giant chain supermarket. In this case anti-capitalist squatters took up the cause of their small business neighbors. Finally, the feared eviction of the Paris music venue La Miroiterie has been delayed –it’s the so-called “winter truce.”

Housing is what squatting has always been about. In this issue, a roundup article examines the concrete links between the new 15M and the old squatting movements in Madrid. In an interview, members of Jeudi Noir, the spectacular new French activist collective, tell the artworld how they take over apartments in Paris. An editor of a political art journal describes and interviews an artist who has worked within the vernacular artform of eviction barricades, and the history of a house comes to light.

Then begins the meat of this number, which might be called the Culture Issue of House Magic. A contemporary art museum in San Francisco mounted a show called “Occupy Bay Area.” It included visual artifacts –posters and photographs– from some of the notable historic occupations which have preceded the recent movement. Occupy Oakland particularly is renowned for its crustiness, and a selection of texts here recounts the bare bones of a history that shows why.

The annual Berlin Biennale contemporary art exhibition in 2012 was curated by an artist. He invited 15M and Occupy Wall Street activists to encamp in the show. While it may not have been successful art, the gesture produced some interesting situations, including a collaborative manifesto between the



Tiny tents in Berlin, 2009. German artist Hermann Josef Hack set up miniature refugee camps to highlight suffering from climate change.

Spanish and the North Americans, and a full-blown clash between art and movement cultures. Finally, the activists generated advice –“How to build up horizontality”– for the benighted authoritarians and sheep in the artworld...

Then we come to the occupation movement which is certainly the most dramatic and possibly the most important

- ***“We transformed ESC into a white, empty space, where people could enter, take colors or pencils and draw this way the boundary between artist and observer collapsed”***

for workers in culture –the wave of Italian theater occupations. In response to a failing state cultural policy, artists at Teatro Valle in Rome took it over in 2011. Their self-organization quickly gained some mainstream support, and the movement spread to other cities in Italy. This section includes an original contribution to House Magic, an account of the genesis and circulation of a touring stage play based on the experiences of activists during a massive demonstration in Rome in 2010.

Squatter festivals have long been a way to celebrate the culture and build the solidarity which a resistant movement requires. House Magic takes a quick look at a number of these, continuing a thread opened up in the last issue by a veteran of the 1970s occupation of Ruigoord (see Aja Waalwijk, “On Nomads and Festivals in Free Space” in HM#4). The squares have hated genuinely popular music and its culture for a long time. Even the famous Woodstock festival was bitterly attacked, and the trend in the U.S. continues. Today’s squat festivals don’t have it any easier. But they are mutating new forms as artists style them politically. Artists have been involved in squatting for a long time. Two texts consider the story of one of the most publicized of recent art squats, the so-called Mayfair Squatters, and the Paris precedent that inspired them.

Finally we look at education through the lens of Claudia Bernardi, an early member of the Edu-Factory project, who discusses her work with the ESC social center in Rome. She describes the complex relations hacked out between this occupied space and the university –proximally, Sapienza of the University of Rome– which provided students with services and programs unavailable in the institution. Through these means, Italian students and teachers could confront the brutal Crisis-era cuts and the restructuring of public education that has mobilized students globally. (The Italian mobilizations began first against the “Bologna process,” a 47-state “harmonization” of higher education systems.) They developed the Free Metropolitan University (lumproject.org), using the resources of existing institutions to build the new ones.

Bernardi also describes the projects ESC undertook in support of migrants in Italy –which she compares to the struggle against racist education laws in the southwest USA. Occupa-



Marcher carries a papier mache barricade in NYC, Mayday, 2012.

tion of theaters and other public spaces in Italy, she believes, are “the main antidote to the attacks of the government.”

While readers of House Magic need no convincing on these issues, U.S. education critic Henry A. Giroux succinctly describes the reasoning behind projects like ESC:

- *“Neoliberalism is a philosophy which construes profit making as the essence of democracy and consuming as the only operable form of citizenship”*

“Public institutions are being attacked because they are public, offer spaces for producing critical thought, emphasize human needs over economic needs, and because they are one of the few vital institutions left that can function as democratic public spheres.... Neoliberalism is a philosophy which construes profit making as the essence of democracy and consuming as the only operable form of citizenship.... Its project has nothing to do with education and everything to do with training².”

Education –and its devaluation and social losses– is emerging as an important front of direct action and self-organization, as the recent squat of a historic neighborhood library in Oakland shows. That long-abandoned public library was part of the great Carnegie endowment. The ruthless steel baron of the Gilded Age finally used his wealth to build over 2,500 public libraries across the U.S.A. at the turn of the last century. We have come full circle since over a century ago when Carnegie’s contemporary John Dewey demanded that the school be brought “completely into the current of social life,” and “become a social centre.” Then it could be a place which makes “it possible for each man [and woman!] to be a teacher in some respect unto his neighbor³.”

1. For more on the Italian student movement, see “The Anomalous Wave Rebellion in Italy” pamphlet (PDF) at indymedia.org.uk/en/2008/11/413258.html. The 56A Infoshop in London produced this text on student and university organizing in Italy in the 2000s; it also backgrounds DB’s text in the theater section of this issue.

2. Henry A. Giroux, “War on Youth,” 2nd annual lecture at historiesofviolence.com/ (via truth-out.org/)/news/item/13030-a-conversation-with-henry-a-giroux

3. From the influential early text by John Dewey, “The school as social centre,” in *The Elementary School Teacher*, October, 1902; online at cws.illinois.edu

Necessary Squats

by Miguel Ángel Martínez

Madrid, 22 September 2012

It's been an exhausting day. When a squatted building is evicted, one has to speak with many people, move furniture, write, and continually meet and think about what to do from here on out. Many planned activities have been thwarted. All work and resources invested in making the building livable have been plunged into sudden darkness. Vacancy and dust again have taken over the space.

Yesterday, September 19, 2012, the CSOA (squatted and self-managed social center) Casablanca was evicted after two and a half years of squatting. Actually, Casablanca was the continuation of four earlier projects initiated in 2006. But Casablanca certainly was the one that lasted longest, probably due to its confluence with the 15M movement. Its central location, the size and quality of the building, the hard work of self-organization and care through the assembly, plus an effective legal defense strategy, helped to win over the thousands of people and groups who have used it. Until the last day we discussed whether to set prices for drinks, because almost everything was free or at affordable prices

to help the self-organized projects people put forward. The more time passed, the more social diversity circulated through Casablanca, sticking to the daily work required to extend the self-organization. We did our best to "break the ghetto." In the middle of the city, in the heart of property speculation, an oasis emerged for the expression of much that is censored, marginalized and excluded in our society. Just listing the hundreds of projects, debates and festivals we have hosted is sad, for these lists can provide only a glimmer of the political and personal enrichment that has been generated at Casablanca.

● *We did our best to break the ghetto. An oasis emerged...*

A few months ago the Royal Spanish Academy of Language agreed to incorporate the term "okupa" [squat] with "k" in their dictionary. And it was about time. The recent boom in squats since mid-2011, fueled both by the economic crisis and by the strong response of society in the faces of those who govern through deceit, has only highlighted a practice which has a long history in Spain. It has been going on



Eviction of the re-occupation of Casablanca in Madrid in September, 2012.

for at least three decades, sharing discourses and forms of politics from below, independent of institutional politics, and radically anti-capitalist. The legitimacy of entering an empty property without permission of the owner, however, has not always enjoyed mainstream social support. And that is why squatters have always denounced speculation by absentee landlords while at the same time meeting the needs for residential and social space for those who fall outside the rules, who cannot afford market prices, or are victimized by the arbitrary way governments deliver public goods. Obviously, more and more people are facing the tragedy of homelessness, and thus are increasingly accepting that squatting empty buildings which have no immediate use is a handy option for survival. At least for a while.

The Spanish Penal Code of 1995 made squatting from one day to another into a crime. What one day was a simple civil lawsuit, the next day was supposedly going to be a serious crime. But generations of squatter activists would not believe that story, as they have continued to challenge criminalization and liberate spaces. However, the sword of eviction and possible criminal conviction hangs over every new attempt. Against all odds, the Casablanca CSOA had drawn this dangerous card.

A year ago, the legal complaint filed by the proprietor, the real-estate company Monteverde, against the squatters of Casablanca was permanently closed by the court. The presiding judge did not identify any individual author of the squat, nor any crime in the activities that had been developed there. The Monteverde company –which, like many other real estate developers, has been accused of encouraging political corruption– tried again in June of this year. And another judge in the same court decided to forget about the existence of the previous record, and to take no notice of the hundreds of people who would be affected by something as serious as a judgment of eviction.

This forgetfulness is too convenient. There are altogether too many illegalities not to deduce that there is someone behind the curtain screaming “get them out somehow and soon.” Maybe they fear the call of 25 September to surround the Spanish Parliament, which is only a few blocks away. Or maybe they want revenge because so many committees, meetings and working groups of the 15M movement made Casablanca their principal residence. It may be that some malicious authorities are deceitfully following their own attack dogs on the right-wing media who have been braying that the squatters “directed” the outraged masses of “indignadas” [indignant ones of 15M]. This despite the publicly open and horizontal assemblies that run all 15M affairs.

The squat Casablanca had brought to light that the Yoopro company acquired this building in 2001 for about 4 million euros, and sold it in 2004 to Monteverde for about 12. The first company, as if by magic, succeeded in qualifying the old school building as a residential building, so that the new investors could profit from selling rehabilitated apartments at astronomical prices, no less than half a

million euros each. Unfortunately for them, they went into bankruptcy before the work was finished, and the place became a ghost building for more than a decade. If only for that squats are necessary.

However, squatting is something else than an accusation against real-estate speculators. It also goes beyond giving new life to a dead building. And it is also something that involves more issues than the threats to the security of activists who risk themselves to defy the law. The next step of squatting is always cheerful and creative. It’s about building life alternatives, egalitarian social relations, non-commercial entertainment, struggles of many social movements, direct democracy, cooperation and learning. None of this is a crime. All of it can help to wake up a whole lot of people from an endless nightmare. And squatted spaces, recovered, released and self-managed, turn out to be fruitful incubators for collective welfare experiments, counter-power and autonomous management of everyday life. For this squats are also essential.

Even now, when people have so many signs of the depletion of the chimeric hyper-mortgaged ownership society, the error-ridden path we have enthusiastically followed along from the developmentalism of the Franco era, it is surprising that the absolute conception of private property continues to govern the destinies of those who need an affordable place to live or to socialize with their peers and others. The squatting movement confronts the dogma of private property, but leaves open many doors. Those

● *Squats are incubators
for collective welfare
experiments,
counter-power and
autonomous management
of everyday life*

without power have power. The old slogan still applies in the real estate and financial debacle into which the ruling classes have thrown us. There are manuals of squatting, experienced people, and abundant vacant properties which are a scandalous waste of collective resources. Squatting will follow claiming legitimacy if there are no other feasible alternatives for housing people in need. Neither the current strength of the Penal Code nor the recent abusive reform of the regulation on Renting can stem the needs –and therefore the social rights– of those who do not own any property. In Casablanca we have shown that we have won the battle for political legitimacy. We had even won the legal battle before someone decided to play dirty. Those were our weapons. The authorities, headed by the State

EVICCTIONS

Government, have opted to use their weapons, which are much less dialectical, and to increase repression with all the means at their command. In Madrid this year, the CSOAs la Osera (the Den), la Salamanquesa (the Salaman-der), and la Cantera (the Quarry) have all been evicted using similar expedited tricks. Now our turn has come. What has changed is that with each eviction there is more and more unity among social centers, various self-organized groups and a population disillusioned with this massive scam called “the Crisis.” So our struggle has just begun.

· From miguelangelmartinez.net/?The-necessary-squat. In mid-October, the building was re-occupied and named CSOA Magrit (the ancient name for Madrid). It was quickly evicted. As we go to press at the end of 2012, the 10,000 volume library of the BiblioSol, the relocated library of the Puerta del

Sol encampment of the 15M movement, and the 15M Archive are still held hostage inside the closed-up building.

· There has been a string of evictions of Madrid social centers by the conservative government this year. These include – La Salamanquesa in Salamanca barrio, in May of ‘12; La Osera in Usera, and La Cantera in Vicalvaro in July.

· La Salamanquesa – madridiario.es/2012/Mayo/canal-social/217518/policia-desalojo-centro-okupado-salamanquesa.html – they have recently occupied a new building in the Madrid barrio of Moratalaz – esasalamanquesa.net

· La Osera – ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/07/05/madrid/1341504517_666016.html

· La Cantera – lacanteraicalvaro.wordpress.com



“Disobey, organize, struggle”. Eko ESLA opened in 2012 in barrio Carabanchel, in the south part of Madrid. This “ESLA = sociocultural space freed self-managed” is huge, with a program that includes “readings, lectures, screenings, children’s area, workshops, art, library, Office of Social Rights (ODS), theater, cinema, debates, language classes, and concerts.” See eslaeko.net/

Jane's Walk

by Alberto Corsín Jiménez and Adolfo Estalella

...On May 5 2012 some of the members of Lavapiés' Popular Assembly hosted a Jane Jacobs Walk in Madrid. Jane Jacobs Walks are free neighbourhood walking (or bicycling, wheelchair, or simply transit) tours self-organized by members of a local community in celebration of Jane Jacobs' commitment to grassroots urbanism. Walks take place in the first weekend of May and are organised annually in cities worldwide.

Adolfo first saw news of this year's walk on Facebook. He identified the volunteers who are behind the initiative as two persons heavily involved in La Tabacalera, an abandoned tobacco factory that is today Madrid's most famous squatted social centre. The walk starts at 11:00am. Some twenty-five people have shown up and upon arriving Adolfo recognises familiar faces from the assembly and La Tabacalera.

This year's walk has been planned around the history of squatter centres in Lavapiés. The walk starts in Cambalache, a peculiar type of local Madrid housing project known as *corrala*. *Corralas* were first built in the sixteenth century and were distinguished by the spatial organisation of housing around a central patio. They theatricalised community life in this interior plaza. *Corralas* were the baroque's architectural response to massive rural-urban migration and have since become a symbol for immigrant housing in Madrid.

Amongst Madrid's *corralas* Cambalache is known today for being a squatted social centre. Upon arriving to Cambalache the walking tour is invited inside the *corrala*. The history of the building is told to them whilst standing in the patio. The *corrala* was built in the nineteenth century. It was partially bombarded during the Spanish Civil War. Anarchist booksellers used to take refuge in the patio when running away from far-right radicals. The name Cambalache is very recent and was given to the building in memory of a porn film shop that used to occupy part of the premises. One can still see the shop's sign hanging on one of the walls. Squatters moved in only eight months ago. One of the squatters says that upon moving in, he found tens of letters lying on the floor of

one of the apartments. They turned out to have been written by someone who had likely been a burglar and corresponded with a collaborator now in prison. The men talked about stings they should have carried out but in the end failed to do so.

The group leaves Cambalache and makes its way to the Parque del Casino de la Reina, one of Lavapiés largest squares and a meeting point for the assembly. However, it is not assembly affairs that brings the group here but the history of Labo1. Labo1, short for Laboratory1, is a landmark in the history of squatting in Madrid. (In time, this first laboratory in squatting was succeeded by three more experiments, Labos 2 to 4.) The history of Labo1 harks back to 1996. The fall of that year was a particularly ruinous time for Madrid's squatters, with the eviction of some three occupied buildings in scarcely a few weeks. Some of these squats then made a decision early in 1997 to come together in one singular occupation: an abandoned veterinary school that stretched over three buildings and circled around a large patio. The buildings housed a number of laboratories that thence provided the name for the squatting project, and that rang true, moreover, to the experimental nature that some ascribed to this particular occupation.

● *Theatricalised community life in the buildings called "corralas"*

The idea of 'experimentation' is insistently singled out by our tour guides. Unlike previous occupations, they note, the move to occupy the veterinary school took place in daylight. The squats even called for a press conference where they came forward and drew attention to their urban personas as, indeed, squatters. The occupation was therefore explicitly conceptualised as an 'opening towards the territory', as one of the original Labo1 squatters put it to the group: 'we wanted to leave behind the typical enclosure of squatting –to make an open intervention in the territory. That was the idea behind making the occupation public.' As an experimental project, Labo1 'lay the grounds for creating a certain impunity for intervening in the neighbourhood's public space' –the neighbourhood as an experimental ground for thinking and doing public space. 'We also had Internet connection at a time when few people had', another original Labo1 squatter adds at one point, as if to stress the extent of the Laboratory's experimental vanguard. Someone remarks that Labo2, the second reincarnation of the laboratory project, following the squat's eviction from the vet school in December 1998, was home to some of the first hacking academies and free hosting websites in Spain. 'What on earth did squats do before the age of the Internet?', someone retorts jokingly.

The group leaves the park and crosses over to La Tabacalera, the morning's third stop. The old tobacco factory was occupied in 2010 and signals another momentous landmark in the history of squatting in Madrid. For the first time, the occupation was actually 'blessed' by the authorities. The building had long been conceded to the Ministry of Culture for the future location of a

national centre in contemporary visual arts. But when the crisis hit public finances the project had to be shelved. In its place, the Ministry reached an agreement with a group of local artists, university professors and activists (many of whom were once associated with the various Labo squatting projects) to have the building turned into a centro social auto-gestionado, a selforganised community centre. On occasions we have heard some people refer to La Tabacalera as the fifth of the Labo projects, one that signals a moment of experimentation in squatters' relationship with the State. Today the woman who tells us the story of La Tabacalera starts by making reference to a local schoolteacher's initiative to have a local debate about the uses the neighbourhood could give the abandoned building. That was back in the year 2000. Later, in 2004, a group of locals aired a concern about the scaffolding of the building's façade. Installed at a time when the Ministry still had an ambitious plan for the building, the scaffolding was seriously damaging its structural conditions. The occupation was a reaction to such deterioration. Squatting, she implies, is a project of care towards our urban surroundings.

● *Squatting is a project of care towards our urban surroundings*

The Walk moves on: straight to Labo2, skipping planned visits to Labo3 and El Solar de Olivar, although the histories of these occupations are told to us as we march. Labo3 hosted the experimental squatting project from 2002-2003. El Solar de Olivar, also known as the 'Laboratory in exile', is a vacant plot whose occupation was conceived as a form of squatting 'without a building'. El Solar thus marked the extension of the concept of squatting to the neighbourhood at large: it was the neighbourhood as a community that was being called to make an appearance and fill-in the vacant ground, and in so doing take responsibility for –take care of– its management. The Walk comes to an end at Plaza de Cabestreros, one of Lavapiés' Popular Assembly's meeting points. It is here that, in recounting the history of the various squatting projects that have seen the light in the neighbourhood over the past twenty years, someone notes that the rise of the assembly last year could well be placed in this genealogy of occupations. 'With every eviction of a squatting project', he notes, 'there goes a bit of local history. Public space is reinstated as a blank slate. The assembly, however, has popped up as the latest of such "irregularities" in the governance of public space.'

Experimental rhythms

The itinerary of Jane's Walk is no doubt a celebration of the history of squatting in Madrid, and in particular of the experimental role of such projects in the redefinition of the local urban commons as a neighbourhood commons. It is the neighbourhood's history, of immigration, anarchism, deviance and revolution, that is narrated as the group travels its streets;

and it is the neighbourhood's infrastructures, architecture, buildings, schools, plazas, vacant plots, that are re-inscribed into such a narration as its political material forms. The story makes space for the appearance of the assembly as indeed the latest of such infrastructural and political projects. The assembly as a laboratory for neighbourly life –a space for the production of 'irregularities', in the idiom noted above.

In a very real sense, the Walk also serves to 'rhythm' the assembly as an urban practice. This is of course what Jane's Walks worldwide are meant to do: to open-up spatio-temporal excursions through which the city is experienced anew. In the case of the Lavapiés Walk, however, there is a second sense in which the march helped produce a particular kind of urban rhythm. By framing the assembly as a historical form of squatting, the walk further offered a spatial and temporal format for thinking about it as an experimental urban object.

Ever since its constitution on May 2011, the ghost of squatting and occupation has been haunting the assembly. The assembly has been meeting weekly in the Parque del Casino de la Reina, which as we saw above was home to the launch of Labo1. The park is also only metres away from La Tabacalera. Attendants to the assembly's meetings have spent hours discussing the importance to remain independent from the many squatting and activist projects and centres that populate the neighbourhood. The arrival of winter, for instance, was dreaded by many, for it was anticipated that attendants would eventually concede taking the assembly indoors, to one of the nearby squatted buildings. (Although the politics involved in deciding whom should 'host' the assembly turned out so controversial that the assembly finally remained put throughout winter.) The structural analogy between #occupation and squatting has been noted by many...

Excerpted from "What Is a Neighbor? Notes on #Occupying the Urban Relation," a long paper submitted to HAU, Journal of Ethnographic Theory; posted at prototyping.es/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Corsin_Estalella_What-Is-Neighbour.pdf

Abstract: The Occupy movement in Spain, locally known as the May 15 movement (15M), singularly developed throughout 2011 into a network of local neighbourhood 'popular assemblies'. Over one hundred such assemblies cropped up in Madrid alone. This paper explores the conceptual and infrastructural work invested by the assemblies in the production of a particular experience of 'neighbourhood' (barrio). **The barrio has become the centrepiece of the assemblies' political and geographical imagination.** We offer here an ethnographic account of how the work of assembling (inside and outside the assembly form proper) is constitutive of a new experience of relationality, which assembly-goers refer to as 'making neighbours'. One makes neighbours through processes of deambulation, and through an investment in the rhythmic and atmospheric production of space. The neighbour fares thus as an 'atmospheric person'. Further, it has in this guise become both a model of and a model for political citizenship; and neighbourliness, in this light, a 'right to the city'. People's exploration of the question, 'What is a neighbour?' offers thus an ethnographic case study on the invention of novel forms of social relations and political values in an urban commons – on the rise of the urban persona of the neighbour as a social-cum-political experimenter.

Creative Destruction

by Jens Balzer

The marshal came in the early morning hours, accompanied by a locksmith and a police officer. After playing a funeral march on a piano, the last tenants left peacefully. Their eviction earlier this month marks the end of the 22-year history of Tacheles, a world-famous artists' center in Berlin's Mitte district.

Tacheles long ago lost its edgy cachet within Berlin's creative scene. But as a symbol, it stood for the city's commitment to culture over or at least alongside capital. Its demise should be a call to arms for those who want to make sure Berlin stays that way.

Located in the heart of Berlin, just a short walk from Parliament and the chancellery, Tacheles was housed in the romantically dilapidated wreck of a former East German department store. After the Berlin Wall came down, the site quickly emerged as a locus of the burgeoning Berlin underground, providing a meeting point for musicians, artists, gallery owners and theater people.

Tacheles's fate was always in question –its occupants were squatters, with no firm legal claim to the property. For Berlin's inhabitants and visitors alike, then, its very existence stood for the idea that the newly unified city could and would provide space for creative experiments. The art center also stood for the harmonious relationship between the anarchic underground and the official culture of the capital, which is why its eviction resounded prominently in the international news media.

- ***Hypertrophic gentrification is driving up prices***

Berliners, on the other hand, could hardly be bothered. It has been at least a decade since the house and its tenants have produced any kind of relevant creative impulse. The cluster of underground galleries and clubs that appeared around Tacheles in the 1990s has long since moved on, driven out by rising rents to neighborhoods in the former east and, later, to less expensive parts of former West Berlin. Bars and clubs sprang

up in unused industrial buildings and along the fallow banks of the Spree River.

But this era is now ending as well. The rapid sale of the city's profitable land to real estate developers, often by the notoriously broke city itself, has led to the expulsion of the creative scene from the shores of the Spree, while hypertrophic gentrification is driving up prices in neighborhoods that, only a few years ago, were just beginning to be settled by artists and musicians.

- ***Call it the “closing of the frontier”***

Within this context, the shuttering of Tacheles is symbolic. The toppling of a living monument to subculture comes at a time when similar spaces in every Berlin district near the center of the city are disappearing as well.

Not that the procedure itself is unusual: In New York, creative types have fled from Manhattan to Brooklyn and will move on from there when prices rise. Gentrification is part of the normal development of every city in the world.

But development in Berlin over the last 20 years hasn't followed the normal path. The creative scene was formed during the anything-goes years after the fall of the wall. Part of its identity has been the certainty that new spaces will open up when older ones close down. Somewhere, somehow, there was always an abandoned building or lot –the next Tacheles –to be appropriated, if for only a limited amount of time. During the last two decades, “Zwischennutzung,” or “temporary use,” was the magic word for Berlin cultural policies.

This era is now coming to an end. Call it the “closing of the frontier.”

What next? Berlin basks in the international attraction that all those spaces for subculture provided. In no small part, this attraction comes from the fact that life in Berlin, compared with other cities, is still quite cheap. In the words of the city's mayor, Klaus Wowereit, “Berlin is poor, but sexy.”

Should official policy aim at keeping Berlin poor enough to encourage the further influx of sexy hipsters? The majority of Berliners say no. Most would prefer more prosperity for the city and for themselves. They would rather see fewer tourists and more business development.

On the other hand, what happens if the tourists stay away and the international public turns its back on Berlin? The prosperity of the famous night life depends on the young tourists of the so-called Easy Jet set, and the still blossoming gallery scene wouldn't survive without solvent collectors from abroad.

● *They must learn to professionalize*

And it's not as if the global corporate elite are clamoring to get into Berlin. There is no growing industrial or financial sector to drive the city's wealth. Berlin still has the highest unemployment rate among German states, and its few booming industries, like web development, belong to the creative sector. Thus the paradox: the more development, the less attractive Berlin will be to the creative classes, which in turn fuel the city's development.

That's why members of the subculture aren't the only ones who fear the end of the "Berlin myth." Even conservative politicians have started to fight for it –and of course have to face a quandary: you cannot institutionalize the anarchic freedom of the early years after the fall of the wall. In the end, this conundrum can be solved only by the protagonists of the subculture themselves. After 20 years of anarchy, of squatting and relying on a sympathetic City Hall to keep away the eviction notices, they must learn to professionalize, to find a long-term perspective for cultural visions and lifestyles.

Generation Tacheles, entrenched in a spirit of total opposition against capitalist structures, is in no position to achieve this. The generation that succeeds it just might be. The owners of Berghain, a world-famous dance club near the Spree, bought their site from its previous owner, a power company, and are now remodeling it, transforming the space into a multifaceted cultural site.

The original owners of Bar 25, another renowned night-life spot, have forged a broad alliance within the local economy and politics, aimed at installing an innovative artists' colony on their former site by the Spree, complete with galleries, clubs and theaters, but also with apartments, kindergartens and schools. With this project, the tail end of the anarchic phase in Berlin's creative scene could provide for a lasting permeation of art and life, long after Tacheles has fallen to the developers' shovel.

·From nytimes.com/2012/09/20/opinion/creative-destruction-of-an-artists-center-in-berlin.html also their International Herald Tribune



Detail from poster for "Occupied Real Estate" show at Exit Art, NYC, May 2012..

The Sabotaj Story

by Needle Collective

In Brighton there is a tradition of resistance to the invasion of supermarkets, with squats sometimes being used as a means of community resistance. Examples would be the Locomotive Works (2002) and the Lewes Road Community Garden (2009–2010). The Sabotaj squat (2011) was a short-lived recent action and here one participant in the Squatters Network of Brighton shares some personal thoughts.

When concerned locals found out in December 2010 that Sainsburys intended to muscle in on Kemptown, they were furious. St. James Street already had a Co-operative, a Morrisons and a Tesco's. A Sainsburys coming on the very same street was a step too far in the wrong direction, especially since they wanted to take over Taj, a Brighton institution. Taj was a family owned supermarket with three branches in Brighton selling exotic fruit and veg. Not a truly local, organic shop, but still much better than a cloned supermarket.

- *It's never easy living in a barricaded building which could be raided at any time*

A campaign was started to stop Sainsburys taking over the landmark building on the Old Steine at the foot of St. James Street, but unfortunately Taj had gone into administration and Sainsburys had taken on the lease on the shop. What's worse, they did not need to get any planning permission except for minor things like signage since Taj already had all the relevant permissions. This only goes to show the stupidity of planning law, which sees a local shop and a Sainsburys "Local" as the same, and allows Sainsburys to take on previously granted but unused permissions, rather than reviewing them. At Council meetings the common refrain was that councillors did not want another supermarket, but their "hands were tied." The one small victory was that Sainsburys did not get granted an alcohol license, thanks to the campaigners' efforts.

In the absence of anything else happening, what was needed was an occupation, and this happened in February 2011.

Despite the police doing their utmost to evict illegally by trying to kick the door in and threatening bystanders with arrest, the

squatters held it down. An initial meeting in the shop, which was organised at short notice, still drew more than a hundred people. There were a lot of ideas on how to use the space, ranging from art exhibition to people's supermarket. The common theme was that people wanted to hold on to the building rather than give it into the hands of a multinational corporation. Radical and liberal views could agree at least on that. The name Sabotaj quickly emerged.

There was letter writing to councillors and MPs, and a few petitions, concerning the specific case and planning regulations more generally. For the building there was a make your own space day and a one day art event in the basement which drew about 400 people.

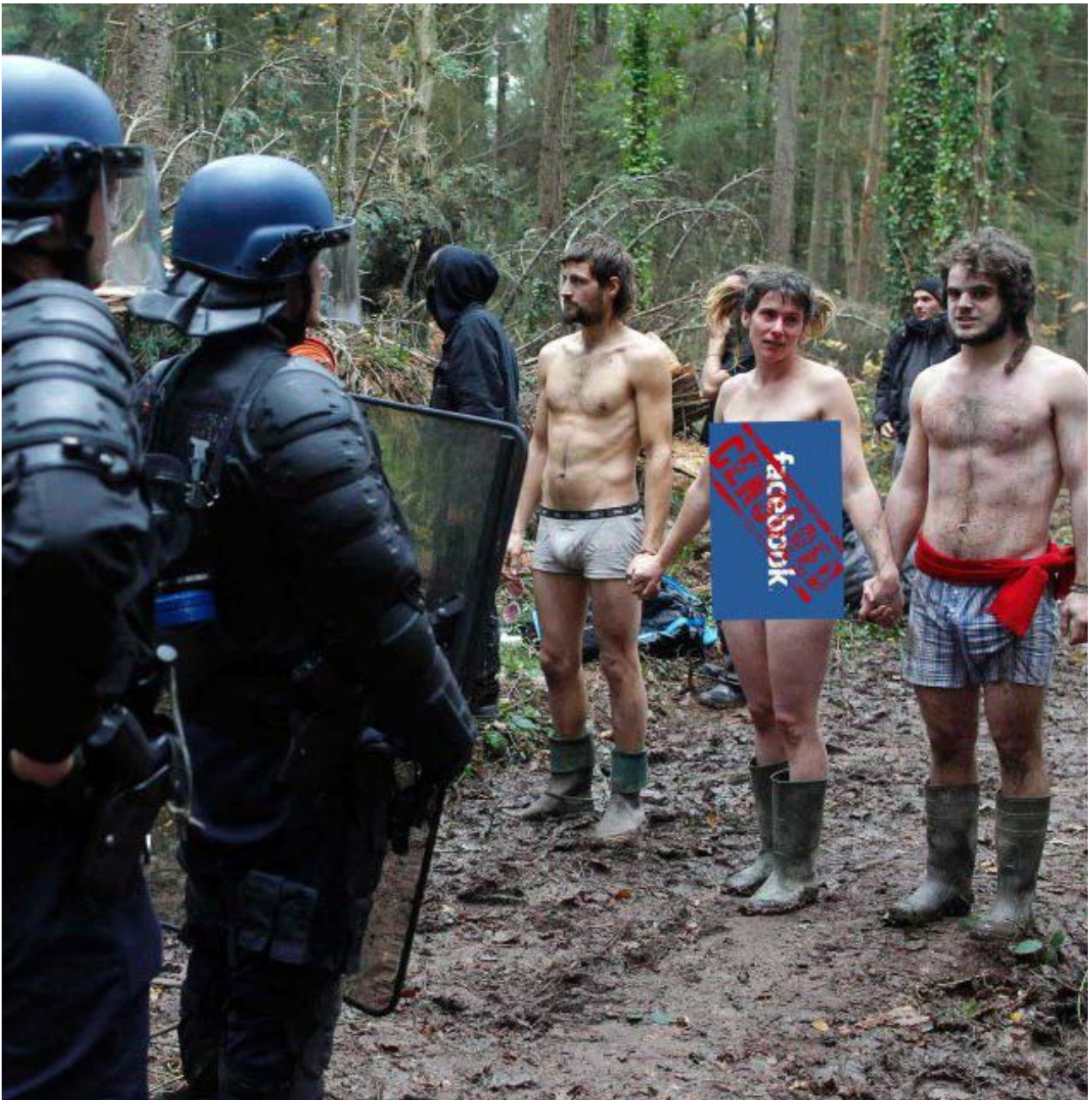
It had been quickly decided that the space should have a safer spaces policy and it was made a drug, alcohol and smoke free zone. In order to deal with any potential problems at the door, an "airlock" system was employed, meaning that there were two locked doors with a hall between them, and only one door was ever unlocked at one time. The two door system gave some protection in case of trouble.

A press release from the squatters read: "By coming down to the building, signing our petition, lending a hand or creative input, and showing your support in other ways, you will be helping to demonstrate in a practical way that economic crisis is not an excuse for corporate takeover of our city."

But sadly, less than two weeks after being occupied, on February 24, Sabotaj was in court and (as expected) possession was granted to the claimant (BDO Administrators). Sabotaj's admittedly shaky legal defence that BDO were not the owners was brushed aside. The Interim Possession Order was served immediately after the court. The bailiffs were expected the next day, so in a show of force the squatters moved their stuff onto the street and gave out free tea and food the whole day. A lot of people stopped by to show solidarity and there was always about sixty people outside. There were also people on the roof. Some shifty bailiff types did turn up but nothing happened.

The problem now was that the crew who had been occupying the building were all exhausted and it's never easy living in a barricaded building which could be raided at any time. So a decision was made to leave. The building was retaken by the forces of darkness on March 2. According to the Argus: "About 50 officers stormed the former Taj store on St James's Street, Brighton, at 10 am and arrested one man." There wasn't actually anyone





Police entering the ZAD ("Zone À Défendre") of squatters protesting the airport construction at Notre-Dame-des-Landes near Nantes, France.

left in the building and the feeling was that the police had to make up an arrest to justify such a ludicrously large operation.

Sainsburys was slow to open, yet by July it had, unfortunately. As *The Source* (a local magazine) put it: "With banner branding that would make most multinationals jealous, SaboTaj occupied the much-loved ethnic supermarket, turning it into an art gallery, but the police arrived early one morning and it was all over. Despite Morrisons being just a few doors up, Kemptown had another new supermarket."

So what had Sabotaj achieved? Well like any short-lived squat project, it had been a burst of energy which both

drained the participants most involved and inspired a huge amount of people who visited the activities at the squat or just read the publicity in the window. It was amazing to have such a large, centrally located squatted project happen without any major problems. It certainly gave a boost to the squatting scene in Brighton. As act of resistance it worked well. We lost eventually, but we won as much as we could. And plenty of other squatted projects have happened since then.

· brighton.squat.net/?page_id=177

Winter Truce

by Jacqueline Feldman

Le Figaro reported last week that La Miroiterie would soon close. The squatters were amused by attention to their case from the conservative national newspaper. In fact, the squatters at La Miroiterie will not be evicted –at least, not this fall. They are sure of staying at 88 rue de Ménilmontant through March 2013 because of the *trêve hivernale*, or winter truce, which forbids evictions in France between November 1 and March 15.

The right to housing in France is constitutional. “It is one of the most important human rights in France,” said Marie Roch, a housing-rights lawyer in Paris. For example, pregnant women behind on their rent cannot be evicted.

Technically, the winter truce does not apply to those who have entered their homes illegally, so it does not apply to most squatters. However, this technicality is less well-known than the truce itself, making the wintertime eviction of squatters impolitic and rare.

The squatters at La Miroiterie are jubilant, and have more concerts planned. They hoped for this outcome in prolonging their legal battle through appeals. “We’re going to win. I think we’re going to win the winter. We’re going to win,” Anne-Sophie, who lives at La Miroiterie, said last week. Roch, who takes capoeira classes at La Miroiterie but does not represent the squat, said the next step for the squat is to petition the city to reclaim the building and allow it to remain a cultural center. Because the law is on the proprietor’s side –as always in these cases– the squatters cannot indefinitely continue to appeal their eviction. “It’s pointless and useless to keep going that way,” Roch said. “But it was useful to do that to win some time” –until the start of the truce.

Marc Ganilsy, a lawyer who has worked with squatter collectives in Paris for 15 years, said the winter truce is not applied uniformly in these cases of illegal occupation. “It depends on the places, on the people, on the conditions of occupation. It’s impossible to make a model,” he said. “It depends on the judges. In this domain, there is never certainty. There are signs, and presumptions.” Ganilsy has heard of the situation at La Miroiterie, and also believes the squatters will stay through March.



La Miroiterie, France (2008). Photo: Daniel Gasienica. The New York Times reports (“For Enclave of Rebel Artists,” 13 March ‘13) that the “mirror factory” will be closed, evicted by the developer owner. The originators of the 14-year-long squat are not especially sad about it. The legalization route does not appeal to them...

The 15-M Movement in Spain: The Big Squat

by Ter Garcia

This March 2012 roundup of squatting in Madrid focuses on the relationship between the 15-M movement, the neighborhood assemblies, and the banks.

"If they evict us, I don't know what we're gonna do. Now we have nothing," says Trini, who lives with her partner and son in one of the eight squatted houses in a building at the center of Madrid. The 500 euros she earns taking care of elders is the only income of her family. As with most of the families that have been forced to squat, Trini and her family want to pay for their house, but at a fair price. "I have a son and I want him to learn that he has to work hard to gain things," explains Trini.

Since 2007 there have been more than 350,000 evictions for unpaid mortgages, according to the AFES, Asociación Afectados por Embargos y Subastas (association of people affected by foreclosures and auctions). Many of these evictions have left entire families with children without homes and, have even been the cause of several suicides, like the case of M.P., who hanged himself in the street on November, 2011, in Catalonia, after being evicted with his wife and two children.

The situation of housing in Spain is especially paradoxical. While hundreds of thousands of families have lost their homes, in 2001 there were more than three million empty houses and today [March 2012] there could be six million. Meanwhile, the financial entities have become the major holders of real estate in the country. Bankia alone owns more than 5 million euros in properties.

In 2008, Miloon Kothari, the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, recommended that Spanish government take steps to lower the price of housing, which last year was 40 percent overvalued and caused mortgages for 50 years, and to enlarge the number of social leasing houses. In 2009 that was one percent of the houses in Spain, five times less than in Italy and 35 times less than in Holland.

In 2005, several social collectives, such as the Platform of Adequate Housing or V de Vivienda, started to demand co-

rective measures from the Government. These groups organized some sit-ins and demonstrations. In 2009, another group was born, the Platform of People Affected by the Mortgage (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca-PAH), which started asking the Government for the dación en pago (canceling of the debt with the bank giving the house). In November of 2010 they decided to take direct action to stop evictions with citizen concentrations in the houses of those affected.

- ***"We denounced the property bubble when the government denied that it existed"***

"We denounced the property bubble when the government denied that it existed," says Ada Colau, one of the founders of PAH. "We knew that it was a problem because the people were over-indebted when paying off their homes and with the economic crisis many families couldn't pay their mortgages. We expected a high number of evictions, but what we didn't know about was a law that can put Spanish people in debt for life."

The PAH anticipated the 15-M movement, but gained strength in May 2011. Today, more than 150 evictions have been stopped and PAH has negotiated hundreds of supportive leases with the banks for these families. The most recent stopped eviction was the one of Patricia and her two children. They live on 399 euros of unemployment assistance. When Patricia stopped paying the mortgage, Bankia kept the house for 50 percent of its value and asked Patricia to pay 200,000 euros for the rest of the price of the house, interest of late payments and legal costs. "Tomorrow is the eviction of Patricia, the next week could be yours. Let's support her," shouted the activists of PAH in a demonstration held in a Madrid neighborhood called San Blas on February 14, the day before the eviction. Next day, the neighbors of Patricia stopped the eviction.

However, this was not enough in the face of the huge number of people losing their homes everyday. Since past summer, PAH opted for squatting empty houses owned by banks to give a place to live to the evicted families under the slogan “One eviction, one squatting.” They were not the only ones.

October 15 was a new turning point. The global demonstration, followed by almost a million people in Madrid, ended in the Spanish capital with the squatting of the Hotel Madrid, a hotel near the square of Puerta del Sol which had been vacant for years. Soon 17 evicted families were living in the Hotel Madrid, and it became a support point for people who had lost their homes. Hotel Madrid was evicted in December, but it also was the starting point of the Housing Office, in which housing and squat activists participate. Housing groups also emerged in the hundreds of assemblies formed in Spain after the camps.

Suddenly, the squat movement, which had in Spain for decades, joined forced with the housing and 15-M movements, giving advice to people that never before had any relation with squatting. “The housing movements of 2005 only did demonstrations, but they were weak about direct action. Before, the squat and housing movement worked separately.

Now, with the 15-M movement, they have converged and this has given strength to them,” explains Miguel Ángel Martínez, researcher on Sociology in the Complutense University (Madrid) and member of the Squatting Europe Kollektive research group.

After the first experience of some coexistence problems in Hotel Madrid, a new wave of squatting followed. Since October 15, 2011, different collectives squatted in dozens of empty buildings in Madrid, mostly owned by banks. In Catalonia there are at least eight squatted buildings also for evicted families. Two of them, in Terrasa, were an initiative of PAH, as shown in the banners hanging from the balconies, that call for a social rent.

Bankia, called Caja Madrid before it was privatized, owns another squatted building near Embajadores square. In 18 of the apartments in this building, there are elders who have been living there for decades, paying a low rent. They have been harassed by the bank to leave the building. In January, nearly 20 people squatted in seven flats of this building. “In a few days, Bankia reacted and put private security in the entrance of the building,” explains K., a young man of 25. K. recently finished his degree in cinema but doesn’t have a job, so he decided to squat one of these apartments. Although the



“IKEA Disobedients - Public space as a non-familiar politically-activated domesticity,” 2012. This work by Andrés Jaque Architects/Office for Political Innovation was bought for MoMA’s Department of Architecture and Design, NYC. It was first shown at the Tabacalera social center in Madrid.

security staff hired by Bankia is not legally authorized to identify or detain anybody, they exert pressure, asking everyone who comes to the building which flat they are going to and why, and blocking the door if they don't receive a satisfactory answer. The rest of the neighbors of the building have complained about it, claiming that it is an attack on their privacy. Aside from the private security, the bank has walled up nearly 50 apartments in the building that are still empty to keep them from being squatted.

"Most of the people living here support the squatting. We are a common front," says K. The squatting of this building also has support in the neighborhood. In January, more than 50 people made a human chain around the building to show their sympathy. Meanwhile, the housing group of the barrio Assembly of Lavapiés is trying to negotiate with Bankia for a social rent for the squatters. Like Trini, K. has been forced to squat because of economic reasons, but he asserts that there is also a political reason. "If law is not fair, justice has to go over the law," he says paraphrasing the film director Jean-Luc Godard.

Aside from the squatted buildings to live in, members of 15-M movement have squatted in almost 50 empty buildings to give them a social use. This is a common practice for decades in Spain, especially in Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao. Since the past year, activists have squatted in 11 buildings in Madrid. Although some of them were evicted by police, seven of them are still going. The chosen buildings are diverse, and mostly owned by the state: hospitals, markets, theaters, and cinemas. There are buildings empty for years and others not completely built because of the crisis, leaving a dead structure for the people of the neighborhood. Now, these buildings are the place of the assemblies of the collectives of 15-M, and they offer also to the people cultural, educational and leisure activities for free organized by the people of the neighborhood.

However, according to Miguel Ángel Martínez, "there are more invisible squattings than political ones." The Housing De-

partment in Madrid says that today, nearly 460 houses of social rent are squatted in the city. This is a small number, but a lot larger than in the past years. "This is a minority situation, but without a doubt there is an increase of squatting," explains an official of the Housing Department. This number is only a small part of the real number of squatted houses, that most of the time are privately owned. The actual number of squatting is impossible to know at the moment, but different sources say there are several thousand squatted houses in Madrid.

● *"There are more invisible squattings than political ones"*

In 2010, court sentences for encroachment –common crime that includes the squatting of empty houses or properties and the illegitimate use of land or water –increased 29 percent from 2009 and 50 percent from 2007. These numbers are only indicative because, as Martínez explains, in many cases the squatters are not charged with encroachment but with other crimes or offenses, like attack on authority.

The Squatting Office in Madrid, created some years ago with a function similar to the squatting offices in Barcelona and Bilbao, gives support to 15 people interested on squatting each week. "The profile has changed a lot since 15-M. Before, young people and some elders with economic problems asked for advice. Now there are a lot of families coming to us," explains S., one of the members of this office. "We don't ask if they want to squat for economic or political reasons". The Squatting Office today is coordinating several housing groups emerged with the 15-M to put in contact people with housing problems to squat together. They have created also support networks in the neighborhoods in which the neighbors give information about empty flats or buildings.

This new squatting wave which emerged from the economic crisis and from the 15-M is possibly the biggest in Spain with maybe only one exception back in the 1990s, asserts Martínez. He sees its reason in the dismantling of the social rent during the last several years.



The "Stamos okupa2" TV series lasted two weeks this year on Spanish television.

· From counterpunch.org/2012/03/02/spain-the-big-squat/

The newspaper *El País* has published human interest stories about squatting in Spain in 2012. See "Squatters Take Over Madrid Neighborhood," 4 October; "Squatting the Land to Rise Up Against Unemployment" (about Andalusia), 8 July, and "The City's Silent Squatters," 21 February 2012. See also Marta G. Franco, "A Year of Small and Big Achievements From the Plazas," 8 June 2012 at diagonalperiodico.net/A-Year-of-Small-and-Big.html.

“Real change needs massive support. Art affects only a minority”

An interview with **Jeudi Noir**

This December 2011 interview with the French activist group concentrates on the tactics and aesthetic techniques that the Paris-based housing group use in their occupations. Conducted in Paris by Anne Faucheret for the Steirischer Herbst arts festival in Austria, the text includes a timeline of their actions.

When and why did you create Jeudi Noir?

Jeudi Noir was founded a few years ago by a group of young students with the aim to change the way how people considered politics and protests. It was also a response to the high rents and the low income of a lot of French people. Their difficulty to find a decent house or flat was the main reason for our first gatherings.

What is the difference between your collective and more “classical” activist groups?

The difference is probably the very precise subject Jeudi Noir is studying: We focus exclusively on questions of housing and lodging. And there is a difference in the way we protest: We prefer humour and happiness to rage –that we of course feel as well. But we decided not to show it too much in order to make our protests and actions more appealing to young activists.

How many members do you have?

There are many members. But there is a difference between active members and supporters. There are almost 1000 supporters but only around 100 people attend our gatherings more or less regularly. And there are about 40 active people that organise the events and actions.

How is Jeudi Noir structured?

Jeudi Noir is an association (“loi 1901” as we say in French), non hierarchical and very open –too much at times–, not related to any political party or to any other groups, although as individuals some of us are close or part of some groups.

So what are the actions in the public space you organize?

Gatherings, dances, flat visits, squats, debates and other stupid but joyous things.

Could you talk a bit more about the “Visites d’appartement”?

The “Visits” are an important part of Jeudi Noir. Each Thursday there is a newspaper coming out (PAP) which offers ads for flats in Paris, often with prohibitive prices –for example a 20 square meter flat in the centre of Paris for more than 900 euro rent per month. In such a case one of us calls the landlord and asks for an appointment to visit the apartment supposedly in order to rent it. At the time of the meeting he first goes there alone, while we others prepare: Put on wigs, get champagne and music. At one moment he tells the landlord that his/her dad is waiting downstairs, and that he/she would go to open the door for him. And then... we all come in and the party starts. With a lot of fun but also with cameras and journalists. We try to interview the landlord about the rent he demands.

● **Put on wigs, get champagne and music**

What happens then? The owners call the police?

Usually in the beginning the owners firstly don’t really understand what’s going on: They are completely confused about the paradox of the massive occupation of their property and, at the same time, the friendly party atmosphere we bring in. That is why they first try themselves to get us out of the building: But since we do not leave, they finally call the police which –surprisingly enough– arrives very quickly.

And your other strand of actions, the “Réquisitions”?

The “Réquisitions» are flats or more often even complete buildings that we occupy and then keep at disposal for students or other people looking for accommodation. It starts with some of us discreetly entering the building (“the submarine

phase”) and then trying for some days or weeks to stay without nobody noticing, but at the same time furnishing the place and establishing ourselves a bit –as a proof of a longer occupation. Then we open the squat and ask some activist friends or collectives to move in. We take the locations, we make them our own. (Squatting is already a negative term. Occupying might be okay but seems too temporary for our taste.) We consider this illegal action as legitimate in regard to the huge number of people waiting for a flat –while a huge number of private and public buildings are empty in Paris. They are kept this way by the landlords and owners in order to speculate on the rise of prices.

Your actions are obviously illegal. What consequences did you have to face? And what precautions do you take?

Yes, the actions are illegal. But they are legitimate. We work on the border between these both views. We explain that by French law wearing trousers as a woman is still illegal (yes, it is true: it is a law that has not been modified since the 19th century!) and that we consider it the same with our occupation. What should be legitimate about the vacancy of millions of square meters of vacancy in Paris while more and more people have problems to find a home? But the law still punishes us sometimes. In our last huge squat we were kicked out by the police after one year of living in a space, having

painted and refurbished it etc. And we were convicted to pay 80.000 euros which we still didn't. We had emptied our bank accounts to prevent them being seized. So the precautions usually are: Discretion during the first phase, then trying to gather a mass and staying anonymous.

Which role do the media play in your actions?

Obviously they are quite important. They are catalysers. They spread the word. Since we are active for quite a while by now, we know some of them. But mostly, they call us after our press releases in order to join to film the action. We don't choose: The more, the better.

Do you have a “normal” audience at your events?

We do, fortunately and unfortunately at the same time. Fortunately because otherwise all of this would be just lame and helpless. Unfortunately because we hoped nobody would need us anymore five years after we started. But still, people are in big shit and have even more difficulties to find places to live. So they still are interested in what we say and offer.

You sensitise the public for structural problems and at the same time you provide at least temporary solutions. But did any of your actions lead to a permanent change?

Well, sometimes later the city offers us a space in a HLM building (the public housing system), but we tend to turn down their offer. We rather stay lobbyists and try to have an effect on politics and laws than focus on single concrete spaces. Sometimes, however, we kept a building for a year like La Marquise at Place des Vosges. Or we managed to change things on a legislative level –for example with a tax on small flats where the rent exceeds 40 euros per square meter.

Did this law come? Why do you think it is a direct result of your actions?

The law was passed just recently under Sarkozy's government –obviously only due to media pressure and not because he suddenly embraced leftist ideology. Our actions aim for a new identity of activism. We want to gain as much media attention as possible on the housing problem and the solutions we propose. The media impulse gives us the possibility to do some very direct lobbying: So the government knows that we will continue our actions if nothing changes. We extend the fight and that is not good for their image.

Some of your strategies can be clearly associated with artistic practises: your carnivalesque dress code, the persona of the Disco King, a torso-like sculpture, and the choreographies your actions employ. Is the choice of artistic strategies a conscious one?

No, they come without clear intention. They happen because we rather want to create something funny than something

SQUAT CINEMA

two documentaries from the european squatter movement

Resistir es Vencer

"To Resist is To Win" is a diy documentary that chronicles a year in the squatters movement in Barcelona in the mid 1990s. Starting with the eviction of the famous Cine Princesa occupation this film follows the demonstrations, occupations, and riots that accompanied this particularly strong period in the squatters movement in Barcelona. Barcelona 1998. 30 min. Spanish (with English subtitles)



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Ungdomshuset (the Youth House) located on Jagtvej 69 in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, was an underground space for music and a rendezvous point for varying anarchist and leftist groups from 1982 until 2007. On 1 March 2007 Ungdomshuset was evicted, sparking days of intense rioting and giving birth to a widespread social movement that fought for a new space for alternative culture. 69 looks at the dramatic events leading up to the eviction of Ungdomshuset through the eyes of the participants in this occupied social center. Denmark 2008. 58 min. Danish with English subtitles

Thursday, June 21st
7:30 pm
Interference Archive
131 8th St. #4, Brooklyn
 [Between 2nd and 3rd Ave : F/G train to 4th Ave/9th st]



boring. Since it is easier to catch people's attention when being dressed all red, white and blue, we wear gowns and wigs instead of our usual clothes. I guess, most of the attention of the media and common people is due to that. The Disco King is an active member of Jeudi Noir: He makes us dance and sing and helps us to enjoy our protests even when the police arrive. He is our star, our mascot.

So even though not having an artistic mission, Jeudi Noir does have specific aesthetics, a specific visual form to convey critical ideas?

Yes, of course. We have our specific graphic design. We have our wigs, shirts, pins. Even our press releases have the recognisable design of our website, which is starting to become quite popular.

So do you think artistic strategies can improve activist actions?

Well, this is a personal answer, I cannot speak for the whole group here. But for me the gap between art and activism is stupid. It exists only because artists here don't feel the need to be activists anymore. In countries where they don't have the right to express their voice, art and activism are immediately linked. I think artistic strategies can improve activist actions or at least make them more interesting.

Can a more engaged art change society?

Yes. In a way. But it is not enough. To make a real change you need massive support. Art affects only a minority.

So, would you be interested in participating in steirischer herbst even though it is an art institution?

Yes, definitely. But as it is very art oriented, I doubt many people from Jeudi Noir will come along.

Short chronology of Jeudi Noir

- October 28th, 2006: First festive intervention. Two "flats visits" are recorded on video posted on the web.
- November 4th, 2006: The medial buzz about Jeudi Noir starts.
- December 3rd, 2006: Jeudi Noir meets Jean-Louis Borloo, Minister of Housing.
- September 1st, 2007: Jeudi Noir discreetly occupies an empty private building in the 16th district of Paris. Accommodation of 45 students.
- September 6th, 2007: 12 CRS (French anti-riot force) busses cover the building as agents carry out occupants.
- April 9th-Mai 14th, 2008: Squat "Impasse" (dead-end) in the 3rd district, which is finally ended by the police.
- January 29th, 2009: Launching of the illegal "Student Campus Jeudi Noir" in the 5th district near Sorbonne.
- October 1st, 2009: Publication of the "Little Black Housing Book" ("Petit livre noir du logement").
- October 31st, 2009: Occupation of a building at Place des Vosges (a residential royal square from the 17th century) and beginning of the squat "La Marquise".
- October 23rd, 2010: eviction from "La Marquise".
- December 22nd, 2010: Beginning of the squat at 22nd Avenue de Matignon (near the house of the prime minister).
- February 28th, 2011: Police evicts the Matignon occupation after having illegally blocked all entrances of the building in an attempt to starve the participants.

• From truthisconcrete.org/interviews/real-change-needs-massive-support-art-affects-only-a-minority-2/

Notorious Possession: Occupying Foreclosed Homes With Art

by Robby Herbst

Los Angeles, September 2012

Of the three building occupations to which I've been privy, two involved elaborately constructed defenses –contortion-inducing obstacles placed to block the advance of cops. But the occupation orchestrated by the artist Olga Koumoundouros at 3411 Holyoke Drive in Los Angeles has no built defenses. The front home there is now actually painted gold so it's very visible. She has been inviting people over to trespass with her. Legally she sees it as "adverse possession" rather than a "Notorious Possession," which is the title she's given this very radical social sculpture she's working on: occupying 3411 Holyoke Drive with gold paint, sculptural installation, and dinner theater.

Real estate takeover is serious business. In the States, long-term squatting has occasionally succeeded in periods of major capital flight. After Zuccotti Park was busted, in a wide tack, many in Occupy Wall Street went to work in the trenches of debt and income inequality. In Early Dec. 2011, in a highly publicized, and quickly quashed move, occupiers and a homeless family took-over foreclosed property in East New York. Occupy Homes and other groups have sprung up in the Big Apple and today are working on legal defense for foreclosed tenants, and supporting tenant strikes. There "Shlomo" tells me that under the radar they are still helping homeless folks occupy foreclosed properties. Bilal Ali, of Los Angeles' Occupy the Hood, tells me that after City Hall was busted, folks felt "the way to sustain the occupation movement was through grassroots initiatives." Fort Hernandez, a home possessed by the Hernandez family in Van Nuys, is so named because it is currently fortified with barricades maintained by members of Occupy L.A., Occupy San Fernando and Occupy the Hood as well as friends and neighbors. The Hernandez family has refused eviction; they say they'll pay the mortgage to the owner if they can produce title for the property. Bank of America has not done so; and the occupiers say they will get arrested defending the rights of the Hernandezes to fight the bank.

On the night of August 29, 2012, Olga's Los Angeles based "Notorious Possession" went public in an evening's event named "Friends and Allies." Attended by a sizable group of L.A.'s contemporary artists, the evening began with mint juleps, then we were ushered to tables set with silverware and pickles. My table also had a copy of a book "Take Back the Land," by Max Rameau. As dinner was served,

actors (including Olga) performed a didactic play, for which the book was called on as a prop for reading. The play, "Four Specter Performance," involved "Four performers each playing a stereotype giving voice to an inner debate." With this disjointed narrative, the play told the story of the death of Patty, who had "owned" the land, and Olga's ultimate decision to take possession of it. At the end of the play we were invited to tour the two homes.

- *The occupiers say they will get arrested defending the rights of the Hernandezes to fight the bank*

The front house had been Patty and her partner Glenda's. It was bare of many of their possessions, but still had some furnishings, books, and a Rosie the Riveter lightswitch. It was at the bottom of the stairs that connected the first and second floor. The rear home had been Richard's. Burnt into its wooden doorsteps is the wiccan saying "merry meet and merry part and merry meet again."

I conducted this interview with Olga about her project, "A Notorious Possession":

What is the story with the property that you've occupied, how did you come to occupy it?

My house almost directly faces the entrance to this property and its two buildings. The women that owned it, Patty and Glenda, were fascinating. They were quite loud with, what they called, their "potty mouths." Our friend and their tenant, Richard, lived in the back house. He was very kind to us when we moved. He helped us get our lawn together and with moving stuff now and again. His daughter babysat my child. When Patty died we were saddened. Around seven months later Glenda left, without telling Richard. I happened to see her on the street with the moving truck and some relatives. She told me she was leaving with them to move back to Kentucky. A couple of months later Richard came to us grappling with his predicament –his friend and landlord left and didn't let him know. He was puzzled because the house was paid in full. Why would she walk away from the property?

I guess Richard brought us into the story. The bits we heard from him piqued our curiosity. We liked hearing about the block and what was going on with its long-time residents. These were houses passed down from generation to generation. Now there are a total of five abandoned properties on the block. It feels like California is leading the nation in foreclosures.

At the time [my partner] and I were dealing with our own delinquent mortgage. We started thinking about a way to avoid foreclosure ourselves by living in their house and renting ours to cover our payments –just until we got from under water. It was through our own desperate need to find a way to get by, that we went over to check out the property.

Once inside the house, we found a box designated for Patty's ashes and felt very uncomfortable about moving in. As an artist I became obsessed with the desire to build a structure to house Patty's ashes. The bank was just going to throw them in the dumpster when they took over. As a sculptor, a long-standing question of mine is how can I show embodiment within an inanimate object? Or how can objects show a life lived? With the property, I had a house to help me investigate these questions.

Why did you paint the house gold?

I decided to paint the house gold when I found out that Glenda and Patty had a \$250,000 lien against the home; it wasn't paid in full. The bank was going to come for it. I realized the story of the home wasn't just about the heartbreak of a lover's despair after the loss of her partner, but here was also the story about foreclosure and economics. Painting it I wanted to make the house even more of an object. I wanted to formally unify it –highlight the crassness of its existence as "housing stock" traded for economic value. I want it to look like a commodity in the most blatant way.

How is it that you relate to the illegality of your actions?

I put the utilities in my name. I invited some young artists to live in the back house. I did some gardening, put out the trash. It turns out there was a big leak in the kitchen so I did some plumbing. A neighborhood is an organism of sorts and problems start to happen when there are holes or dead units in the organism. I deplore the vacancy rate. There are people that need housing and can function well enough to maintain a home. According to the law, as I understand it, the requirements of adverse possession –which is what we hope to qualify for with the site– is to take obvious possession of the house and contribute to its well-being and improvements.

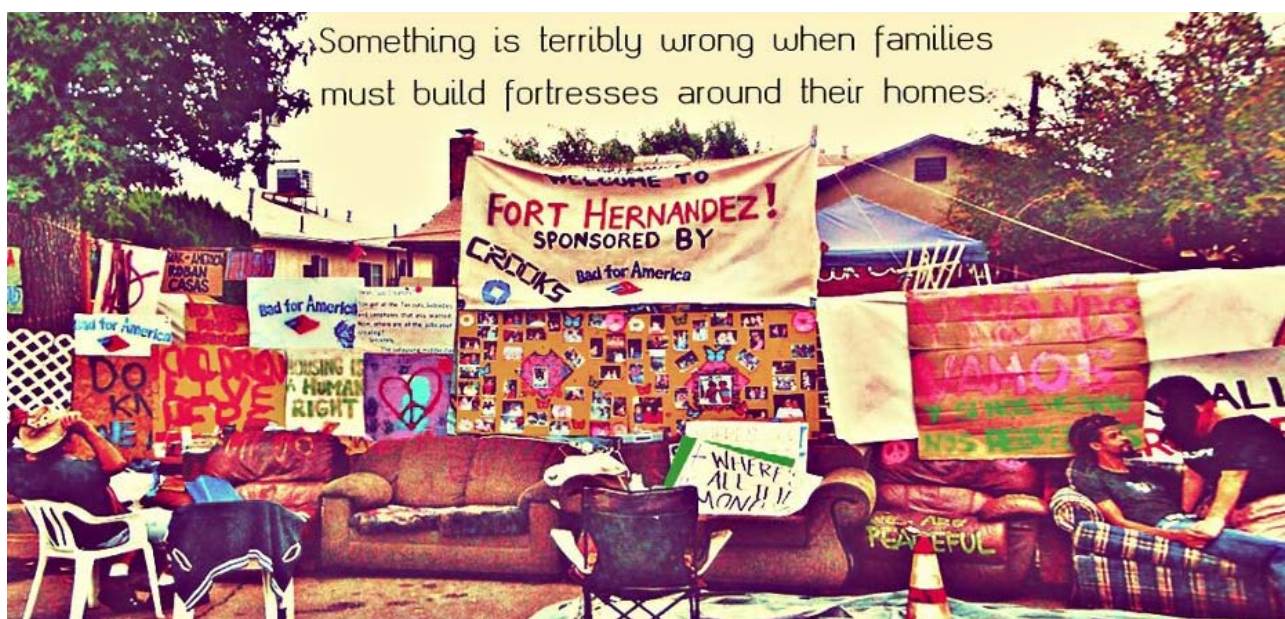
● *It feels like California is leading the nation in foreclosures*

What else do you plan on doing with the "Notorious Possession" site?

After the September 16 event, I plan to bring a conversation with anti-foreclosure activists to the house. It would be nice to have a neighborhood talk there. The folks living in the back house are working on some things as well. I also will be going to the auction when the lien on the house goes up for bid on September 27.

What do you hope to achieve with this project?

I hope to have a conversation with people about Glenda and Patty's lives –how as a lesbian couple, both of whom worked as civil servants, they are a part of the American dream yet suffered in its gaps. By sharing compassion there can be a greater social and political understanding of these gaps. I am



also inserting my own narrative, because I identify with their story. I want to share with others the connections I've made accessing their house. It has helped to break down the isolation, the scariness of things, when I feel like I'm sinking along with the other empty homes on the block.

I also want people to reconsider the aesthetics of this house and others like it in California's landscape. The houses that went up during the housing expansion of the late 80s through 2008, a time when houses were built just to maximize profits, they are only meant to last 20-25 years. We are well aware of their aesthetic problems, yet houses like these are everywhere. In circumstances where the property is worth more than the home, people demolish and simply put them in the dump. Houses aren't disposable! They are treated like this even during a time people are being displaced due to economic lack.

How do you relate to the Occupy Wall Street Movement?

I have been both compelled by, and intellectually supportive of, the movement, though I was only able to visit these occupations a few times. The agenda of exposing the unequal distribution of wealth in the U.S. is one I'm very sympathetic of. I believe strongly that it serves all people to have a strong social contract within society and government.

· From kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/notorious-possession-olga-koumoundouros.html



At the 2011 Art Basel Miami Beach art fair, Olga Koumoundouros and Andrea Bowers completed a project called "Transformer Display for Community Education." As a commissioned public project on a strip of beach there, they erected flimsy shacks peppered with documents pertaining to local grassroots politics. They plastered the sculptures with the Miami-grown slogan - "Take Back The Land." Max Rameau coined this term and the organization of the same name. He showed up at the fair and reportedly built a shack of his own, with Andrea and Olga. Take Back the Land preceded the Occupy movement, but telecasted many of its radical values and tactics: empty homes should be occupied by the homeless, occupation and community building is the way to make this happen. - Robby Herbst.



"007"

by Desmond Dekker (1967)

0-0-7

0-0-7

At ocean eleven

And now rudeboys have a go wail

'Cause them out of jail

Rudeboys cannot fail

'Cause them must get bail

Dem a loot, dem a shoot, dem a wail

A Shanty Town

Dem a loot, dem a shoot, dem a wail

A Shanty Town

Dem rude boys out on probation

A Shanty Town

Them a rude when them come up to town

A Shanty Town...

Police get taller

A Shanty Town

Soldier get longer

A Shanty Town

Rudeboy a weep and a wail

A Shanty Town

Rude boys a weep and a wail

A Shanty Town

· From stlyrics.com "Thanks to Jennings Falcon for corrections"

Showing Occupy

The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco produced the “Occupy Bay Area” exhibition over the summer of ‘12. The show included not only posters and photographs from Occupy SF and Oakland, but creative work for earlier political struggles, including the Black Panther Party, the International Hotel in Manilatown (1968–77); the ARC/AIDS Vigil at City Hall (1985–95); the Occupation of Alcatraz (1969–71); the Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley (1964–65); and the San Francisco State University protests to gain programs in ethnic studies (1968–69). (See ybca.org/occupy-bay-area.)

The curators wrote: The Occupy movement erupted in September 2011 as a direct outcry against the devastating effects of financial instability, the subprime mortgage crisis, and the decline of trust in the government’s ability to effectively address the problems in the labor market. In response to this significant moment of protest about growing economic disparities and related topics, many artists and documentarians have created works that visually express the unique qualities of this widespread action. In particular, “Occupy Bay Area” focuses on the manifestation of the movement in the San Francisco Bay Area and its commitment to direct democratic process and resistance as expressed in political posters; its representation in photojournalism; as well as several key historical precedents for protests based on sit-ins, encampments, and vigils in the region. In addition several projects by contemporary artists representative of the spirit of the Occupy movement are included.

The Occupy movement, while seemingly unwieldy, has demonstrated a unique 21st century approach to progressive activism that has attracted a varied cross section of people representative of many different economic and labor sectors. For this exhibition we focus on four aspects of the movement that we found particularly compelling.

- 1) Encampment, as it has proved to be an effective way to spatially localize collective action and, in a situation of “illegality,” a compelling site for the broadcast of dissent.
- 2) The direct democracy of the general assembly, as it is a display of a collectively-driven rather than leader-oriented approach to organizational decision-making.
- 3) The demands/no demands strategy, which [refused] to make visible or materialize specific sets of actions, as has been the convention of past protest movements.
- 4) The self-organizing social structure of the Occupy movement, as a curious amalgam of the Paris Commune of 1871, where people of diverse classes came together to

create a council sensitive to the needs of workers and the power of the public sphere as a form of political agency; and as a manifestation of aspects of the hippie communes of the 1960s, where there is a partial dissolution of private property and a concerted effort to share food, lodging, and other resources in a specific localized geographic space, oftentimes in a natural setting.

● *The power of the public sphere as a form of political agency*

This exhibition is not meant to represent a fully executed social history, but is a testament to the power of images to evoke the emotional expression of popular and widespread sentiments. We pay special tribute to the role that Bay Area artists have played in giving voice to the 99% and utilizing art as an effective vehicle for social change. Impressively, various political poster artists devote their talents to messaging the politics and culture of the movement by creating iconic images – designs that become a symbol of community, are a call to action or announce an upcoming event. Represented in over 50 posters by 25 Bay Area graphic artists, these works carry forward the region’s long tradition as a leader in political struggles. The exhibition also includes visual material from a sampling of significant political struggles located in the Bay Area where claiming space played an important role for making political change. While Occupy should not be collapsed into the frame of these earlier movements, they are built on a belief that a democratic society must respect the rights of all peoples equally and fairly...

THE HISTORY SECTION...

A selection of texts related to the historical section of the “Occupy Bay Area” exhibition.

“This exhibition is not meant to represent a fully executed social history, but is a testament of the power of images to evoke the emotional expression of popular and wide-spread sentiments. By localizing our efforts, we also pay special tribute to the role that Bay Area artists have played in giving voice to the 99% and utilizing art as an effective vehicle for social change.”

Exhibition press release

The Free Speech Movement (FSM) was a student protest which took place during the 1964–1965 academic year on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley... In protests unprecedented in scope at the time, students insisted that the university administration lift the ban of on-campus political activities and acknowledge the students’ right to free speech and academic freedom...

On December 2, between 1,500 and 4,000 students went in to Sproul Hall... The demonstration was orderly. Some students studied, some watched movies, some sang folk songs... On the steps of Sproul Hall Mario Savio gave a famous speech... Shortly after 2 am on December 4, police cordoned off the building, and at 3:30 am began arresting close to 800 students... About a month later, the university brought charges against the students who organized the sit-in, resulting in an even larger student protest that all but shut down the university.

After much disturbance, the University officials slowly backed down. By January 3, 1965... the Sproul Hall steps [were designated as] an open discussion area during certain hours of the day and permitting tables. This applied to the entire student political spectrum, not just the liberal elements that drove the FSM.

*“Free Speech Movement,”
from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*

The Occupation of Alcatraz was an occupation of Alcatraz Island by the group Indians of All Tribes. [Alcatraz Island was the site of federal prisons, most famously from 1933 until 1963; today it is a historical park.] The Alcatraz Occupation lasted for 19 months, from November 20, 1969, to June 11, 1971, and was forcibly ended by the U.S. government...

According to the [occupiers], the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868) between the U.S. and the Sioux returned all retired, abandoned or out-of-use federal land to the Native people from whom it was acquired. Since Alcatraz penitentiary had been closed on

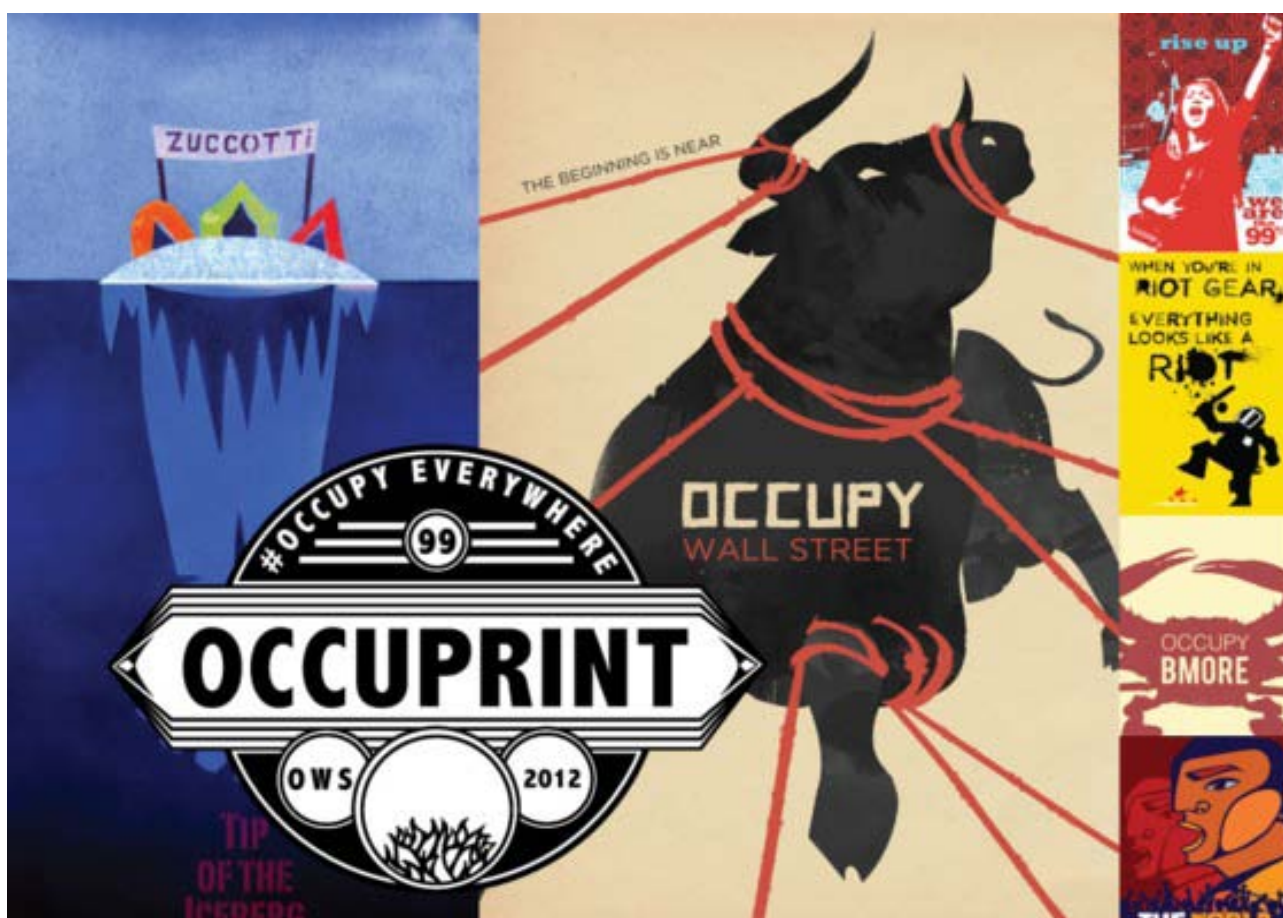
March 21, 1963, and the island had been declared surplus federal property in 1964, a number of Red Power activists felt the island qualified for a reclamation.

On March 8, 1964, a small group of Sioux demonstrated by occupying the island for four hours... According to Adam Fortunate Eagle, this demonstration was an extension of already prevalent Bay Area street theater used to raise awareness...

● Government cut off all electrical power and all telephone service to the island

In 1969... a proclamation, written by Fortunate Eagle, to the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) claimed the island by right of discovery... In the early morning hours of November 20, 1969, 79 American Indians, including students, married couples and six children, set out to occupy Alcatraz Island... By late May, the government had cut off all electrical power and all telephone service to the island. In June, a fire of disputed origin destroyed numerous buildings on the island. Left without power, fresh water, and in the face of diminishing public support and sympathy, the number of occupiers began to dwindle. On





June 11, 1971, a large force of government officers removed the remaining 15 people from the island. The Occupation of Alcatraz had a direct effect on federal Indian policy and, with its visible results, established a precedent for Indian activism.

*“Occupation of Alcatraz”
from Wikipedia, the free
encyclopedia, slightly redacted*

At San Francisco State University a lengthy student strike erupted in 1968 led by the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front. They demanded an Ethnic Studies program as well as an end to the Vietnam War. This became a major news event for weeks in the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.. At one point, University president S.I. Hayakawa famously pulled the wires out of the speakers on top of a van during a student rally. During the course of the strike large numbers of police drawn from many jurisdictions occupied the campus and over 700 people were arrested on various protest-related charges. Finally the longest student strike in the nation’s history resulted in establishment of a College of Ethnic Studies, and increased recruiting and admissions of students of color.

*From “San Francisco
State University,” Wikipedia*

The actions at S.F. State were followed by a 10-day occupation in January of 1969 at Brandeis University, a private liberal arts university in the Boston area. Members of the Brandeis Afro-American Society took over Ford Hall, which they renamed “Malcolm X University.” The occupation ended without agreement on the students’ demands, but with an amnesty for the occupiers. In April of 1969 the faculty approved the African and Afro-American Department.

*Redacted from [lts.brandeis.edu/
research/archives-speccoll/exhibits/
ford/occupation/index.html](https://lts.brandeis.edu/research/archives-speccoll/exhibits/ford/occupation/index.html)*

San Francisco’s Manilatown was a thriving community of Filipinos and Chinese that ran the length of San Francisco’s Kearny Street from Market north to Broadway. From the 1920s, it was home to Filipino barber-shops, drug stores, nightclubs, restaurants, pools halls and, most importantly, rooming houses and hotels. Those were important because, at the time, immigrants from China and the Philippines weren’t allowed to own land or buy property. The International Hotel, on the corner of Kearny and Jackson, was a place for them to call home –a cultural hub for the community. In the 1920s and 30s, the Filipino population was nearly 40,000 men– and only men. Before 1965, the immigration laws allowed entrance only to single men

without families. They were commonly seasonal farmers, longshoremen and factory workers. The I-Hotel was where they came home to get their mail, have a home-cooked meal with friends and rest. But urban renewal came to their neighborhood, and San Francisco wanted to redevelop the financial district and become a stronger presence in the global marketplace...

● *To evict these elderly men would surely mean death for some of them*

By the late 60s, the pool halls and nightclubs of Manilatown were gone and all that was left of the community was the International Hotel. In 1968, the building was sold to... a developer that wanted to clear the lot for parking. Despite full occupancy at the I-Hotel, all the tenants were given eviction notices... [The I-Hotel was defended, and became] a symbol of change that people didn't want to see. It was a symbol of tenant's rights. It was a symbol of the last stand for an ethnic community, for the Filipino community... People could grasp very easily, that to evict these elderly men would mean surely death for some of them. Everyone knew, even at that time, that there really wasn't any other place for them to live. It was one percent occupancy in the city. There were really no alternatives. Local newspapers began running sympathetic articles. Residents of the I-Hotel found support from labor unions, churches, students, gays and lesbians, even Jim Jones' People's Temple...

From her window inside, a defending activist] could see thousands of people outside, chanting and being beaten, but not retaliating...

The International Hotel was demolished four years later in 1981. The lot stayed vacant for decades until it was sold to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese.... Obviously we didn't succeed in our goal of preventing the eviction and saving the building, but the legacy of the International Hotel is that it couldn't happen again. And maybe it took that kind of shock, the image of elderly people being put out at dawn. The sheriff smashing down their doors. The cops on horseback charging into the crowds. Maybe it took those images to really understand what was at stake here. We lost the hotel, we lost the battle, but it's not going to happen again.

*From "Remembering the I-Hotel evictions,"
by Evan Roberts, April 21, 2011, from
kalwnews.org/audio/2010/08/04/
remembering-i-hotel-evictions_508605.html;
the report uses transcripts of audio from
Curtis Choy's documentary
"The Fall of the I-Hotel"
(see chonkmoonhunter.com).*

On October 27th in 1985, two HIV+ gay men chained themselves to the doors of the old federal building at UN Plaza to protest government inaction on HIV/AIDS. Soon they were joined by others, and maintained presence 24/7 for the next several years. They slept in tents and staffed an education table, constantly pressuring the government to put funding and resources into services for people living with HIV/AIDS. This was the spark for an AIDS activism that used direct action tactics to accomplish its goals.

*From "Remembering the
ARC/AIDS Vigil: Day of Action
on HIV and Homelessness,"
organized by: AIDS Housing
Alliance SF, Homonomixxx,
and St James Infirmary; from
indybay.org/newsitems/
2011/11/09/18698521.php*



Detail from poster by Racheal Romero.

Art and Movement Meetings

There have been two prominent efforts in 2012 to integrate elements of the global Occupy movements and art institutions: the Berlin Biennale's 7th edition in the spring, and "Truth Is Concrete," this year's version of the Steirischer Herbst festival in Graz, Austria. Both took on the challenge of displaying (in the first case) and hosting (in the second) key movement participants. The Graz conference, "Truth Is Concrete," was partially streamed, and now is archived. That event was much better funded than the Occupy part of BB7, and differently conceived. From all accounts, BB7 was a collision of activist and artistic cultures. TIC attempted a synthesis, but it was curated, a congress of invitees with an audience. The annual Creative Time Summit in New York took no special pains to reach out to Occupy, but curator Nato Thompson has been closely involved in OWS since it began at the end of last year's summit.

Berlin Biennale, Spring 2012

The 7th edition of the Berlin Biennale took place from April 27 to July 1 of 2012. This large exhibition engaged numerous specific political themes directly. It was curated by Polish political artist Artur Żmijewski together with Joanna Warsza and the Voina art collective of St. Petersburg as associate curators. (The Voina group, named from the Russian *BOHHA*, or War, included Pussy Riot members, and is known for confrontational street actions.)

Artists' works in the BB7 had titles like "how would you like to die?," "Germany gets rid of it," and "Happy New Fear," and projects like a giant "key of return" sculpture and a passport for Palestine, a "Club of Political Critique" in Kiev and Berlin, a "Self #Governing" newspaper for Belarus, a report on German arms trading and the Mexican drug wars, an "alternative parliament" for organizations labelled terrorist, and a program of solidarity actions between BB7 and other art institutions.

- ***Another solidarity project was "Rebranding European Muslims"***

Among these were events in Rome produced by the Swiss Institute with activists from the LUM (Libera Università Metropolitana), which sprang up in the ESC occupation in Rome (including Claudia Bernardi, whose interview on this subject is included in this issue of "House Magic"). They wrote: "we found commonalities between the political collective ESC – Autonomous Atelier in Rome and the Polish group Krytyka Polityczna. We are sup-

porting collaborative actions between them and Swiss political activists, especially those involved in the Occupy movement, as part of our 'Solidarity Action'." This event may have been the most direct contact with an occupied social center and a cultural institution during this phase of art activity. (Jeudi Noir was invited and featured in Graz as well.) Another solidarity project was "Rebranding European Muslims," produced by an Israel-based group at the Steirischer Herbst – (that's "Styrian Autumn," Styria being southern Austria, formerly part of Slovenia). (BB7 Projects – berlinbiennale.de/blog/en/7th-biennale/projects).

- ***Visitors were annoyed having to interact with people on the site***

The Berlin Biennale 7 generated a raft of texts including a newspaper and a book. The show was most notable for giving over the largest exhibition space to activists from the 15M movement in Spain and Occupy Wall Street in the U.S. (mostly New York City). "House Magic" reprints some of the online texts, including the joint declaration of the "Indignadxs|Occupy" at the start of the BB7, parts of letters from Spanish, German and U.S. activists, and, finally, a set of instructions of "How to Build Up Horizontality." These address a central concern of BB7 curator Artur Żmijewski. Because of the conflict and discontent in the cultural community around the development of Berlin, Żmijewski wanted the BB7 to be the place to draft "a new social contract" between artists, art workers, and politicians. (*Website of the Indignadxs|Occupy project in Berlin – occupybb7.org & The occupybiennale blog on the official BB7 website – berlinbiennale.de/blog/7-biennale/indignadxs-occupy*).

The BB7 represented some serious political initiatives within the artworld. Nevertheless, the critical reception by the art press and many other artists was unsympathetic. A review published on the blog of *Afterall*, a joint publication of the Cal Arts (Los Angeles) and Goldsmiths (London) art schools, was a partial defense. Even so, the writer called curator Żmijewski's open call for proposals a "lame and populist tactic." The Indignadxs|Occupy encampment was void of "political force," since they were "sanctioned" in a gallery and taking public money. Żmijewski also sinned by including his own work in the show, indeed of making the show into his own "Gesamtkunstwerk" (total artwork). Visitors were annoyed at having to interact with people on the site – at "the unavailability of a well-oiled viewing machine." She reflects on the ultra-ironic artistic strategies derived from Laibach – "which takes the system more seriously



OWS assembly at the Berlin Biennial, 2012. Photo by Marcin Kalinski.

than it takes itself.” Finally, though, this reviewer realizes that with “the invitation to the Occupy Movement and the Indignados, with their artful resistance to appearing decisive or united, to take up residence” in the BB7 is part of a biennial that “leaves much room for working out what else art can do today” besides offer itself within a viewing machine. (*Monika Szewczyk, “Courage, Comrades: The 7th Berlin Biennial” – afterall.org/online/courage-comrades-the-7th-berlin-biennial*).

“Truth Is Concrete”

“Truth Is Concrete,” this year’s Steirischer Herbst, in Graz, Austria, September 2012

The art annual Steirischer Herbst produced a “24/7 marathon camp” called “Truth Is Concrete” for one week in late September. Around 200 artists, activists, and theorists were invited to “lecture, perform, play, produce, discuss, and collect artistic strategies in politics and political strategies in art. All day long, all night long. It is a platform, a toolbox, as well as a performative statement—an extreme effort at a time that needs some extreme efforts.” “Truth Is Concrete” was styled like a camp, after Tahrir Square or Occupy Wall Street.

- *It was less a movement of shared strategies than a “map of cultural capital in action”*

What made BB7 interesting was the clash of cultures between the artworld and the democratic social movements, and the efforts of grassroots internal reform of an artworld system fatally entrained to the fast-moving invisible flows of global capital. The conference in Graz was more interesting in terms of content. The panel descriptions and the archived Livestreams

are fascinating. But, in a sense, it was more normal. It was a conference, an expanded seminar with a novel form imitative of a protest camp or squatter convergence.

Gavin Grindon reported on the convergence – “not an exhibition but a cultural festival” – in his blog post “Protest Camps and White Cubes” at protestcamps.org. While the producers made a live-in camp, they invited and subsidized the participants, which is different from “groups willfully collaborating for their own strategic reasons.” As well, Grindon writers of the network diagram of collaborators on exhibit which privileged some names, that it was less a movement of shared strategies than a “map of cultural capital in action.” Grindon criticized the frustration born of days of lecture presentations with inadequate time to discuss. The Graz TIC meetings seemed to borrow from, and expand upon, the format of Creative Time’s Summit series, an annual large-audience event with international presenters giving brief talks. The records of both of these events – the “Truth Is Concrete” conference and the Creative Time Summit – offer a great resource for understanding the strong current of social and political work by artists today. (*Gavin Grindon, “Protest Camps and White Cubes” at: protestcamps.org/2012/09/28/793/. Protestcamps.org is an excellent blog, coordinated by Anna Feigenbaum, which revolves around the camp formation, not only recently but in the past; there is, for example, a recent consideration of attacks on the Greenham Common women’s peace camp in UK during the 1980s.*) (“Truth Is Concrete,” the Steirischer Herbst cultural festival, September 21–28, 2012 in Graz, Austria. Texts, commentary, and Livestreams of many of the talks – the tactic talks, particularly – are archived at: truthisconcrete.org/livestream/videos.php) (The Creative Time Summit is a conference “exploring the intersection of art-making and social justice,” a forum for “for the expanding global network of people who believe in the power of artists to make real social change.” Presentations at the four summits – “Confronting Inequity,” 2012; “Living as Form,” 2011; “Revolutions in Public Practice 2,” 2010; and “Revolutions in Public Practice 1,” 2009 – are online at: creativetime.org/summit/presentations/).

We are **NOT** representable

Indignadxs

Occupy: Declaration for the Start of the 7th Berlin Biennale

Since the collapse of the US housing bubble in 2008, a global economic crisis has enveloped the world, striking different countries with varying intensity. Yet everywhere the attempts to solve the crisis have been the same: enormous sums of public money used to rescue a failing financial sector and a crisis-prone economic system, and restore corporate profits; harsh austerity measures and cuts to the public sector; a tremendous loss of pensions, homes, savings and jobs; and above all: a political consensus to leave both the structural causes and the most responsible persons untouched. The crisis has also revealed an embarrassing fact about our so-called enlightened democracies: they no longer work. Whether through the technocratic governments installed in Greece and Italy or the dictates of the Bundesbank, democracy has been suspended in order to do what is deemed necessary for a return to a model of economic growth that does not serve the interests of the majority.

If the effects of the crisis have been global, so too has resistance against the crisis management of national and international governance. From Tunisia to Egypt to Israel, from Greece to Spain, from Germany to the UK, and from Chile to the United States, major popular movements have formed around a common consensus: the people will not pay for a crisis they didn't cause. Nor will we accept the continuation of the failed policies that led to this crisis: deregulation of financial markets, privatization of public utilities, increasingly precarious employment, and an economic growth obsession that is incompatible with life on a finite planet. And we are ready to go further: to call into question our near-religious faith that the capitalist market system can create a stable and sustainable economy that allows everyone to participate. Despite the unprecedented level of material wealth in the world today, our socio-economic structures prevent us from equally enjoying its gains, instead creating crises, asymmetries of power and cutting off billions from even the essential means to survive.

As people from many different countries and backgrounds, we are coming together as occupiers, indignad@s, outraged. Since the early moments of our movement, we decided to take responsibility for our lives and future. Thus, govern-

ments and corporations do not represent us. Politicians do not represent us. The media does not represent us. Individuals do not represent us. We are not representable. We believe in and practice horizontal, collaborative ways of working and developing our positions and actions.

● *Economic growth obsession is incompatible with life on a finite planet*

In contrast to the corruption and unaccountability of corporate and political elites, we openly acknowledge the difficulties of democracy, even as we work together to find genuine solutions to the crisis. We believe that real democracy and an inclusive economic system are worth fighting for. We also believe that many people all over the world share our anger and discontent, as well as our conviction that there are alternatives.

Now it is time to act

We have chosen to participate in the 7th Berlin Biennale for many reasons, some personal, some collectively shared. Above all, the KunstWerke provides us with a space to bring together participants from different countries around the world, to share our experiences from the last year and build new connections to bring our movements forward. The next two months [April and May, 2012] will be a collective experiment, as we work together to transform the gallery hall into a space where we can discuss both political questions and organizational strategies, grow through public interaction, and engage in various forms of activism, from creative actions to mass demonstrations.

Even as we come together during the Biennale, the right to public assembly is being threatened, both by the police and through legislative changes. Water cannons in Chile, tear gas in Oakland and police batons in Spain have been deployed against people raising their voice. The simple act of coming together in public to discuss our future is no longer possible in our famed democracies. The European Union is currently building task forces and legal frameworks to suppress the social uprisings that we saw in Greece or Spain more effectively, and more silently. Across Northern Africa, from Tunisia

to Egypt to Syria, violent state repression has cost many people their lives. The gallery provides us with a temporary safe haven to engage in the work of political change, but the real struggle takes place in the streets.

- *The right to public assembly is being threatened*

This is not an art project or a publicity stunt, nor is it a substitute for the occupation of public space. Although we may be in a gallery in Berlin, we are not a static movement on display. We are part of larger actions unfolding across the planet. In the United States, Occupy Wall Street has called for a general strike on May 1st, a call that will be answered enthusiastically in cities across North America and Europe. Following a year after the emergence of the movement in Spain on 15M, May 12 will be another major day of international demonstrations. In Berlin, demonstrations growing out of neighborhood assemblies will converge from five different points of the city, building an Agora at Alexanderplatz to serve as a two-week hub for networking and an exchange of ideas. On May 16 to 19, a broad international coalition will travel to Frankfurt for Blockupy, an action to blockade the European Central Bank and demand an end to the undemocratic crisis regime of the European Union. Like these major actions, the occupied Berlin Biennale is only a step in the long process of building a successful movement for social, economic and environmental justice. We invite you to join us.

from: berlinbiennale.de/blog/en/?p=25581



BB7

Conversations

An Open Letter to #OccupyBiennale from an activist from Spain

by Carolina

Some weeks have passed since the #OccupyBiennale started. The framework was/is a difficult one: a contemporary art exhibition, probably the most famous one in Europe. Most artists would pay to be there, to have an extra line in their CV that adds Berlin Biennale. However the #occupy and #15M movements were invited, not because of their artistic skills but because of the political process they were living worldwide. There was quite a controversy about participating in an art event, the fear of being “exhibited,” the fear of being swallowed up by a “commercial” event – when art becomes a consumer article and forgets its function of questioning reality – and when transgression is even more marketable than art. “People,” it seems, are so bored in society that they need “adventure,” so art has to sell that adventure. This was the starting point at the Biennale, #occupy | #15M, visitors expected to share an “adventure,” the one that thousands of people are living in their squares, the process of civil disobedience going on in our time. That was the risk and the challenge that was to be overcome when finally the invitation was accepted...

The Institution – When you’re out of the movement, watching it evolve for a few minutes or hours, you do not get a sense of how it came to be; you get no hint that the spectator is not a spectator, but a part of the show. One can imagine building a wall (how ironic would that be in Berlin) one brick at a time, and building it as a separation from what is not wanted (corruption, domination, mental slavery, exploitation of remote, unknown, corrupt invisible hands), and as well as an instrument for a new means for expression (painting, writing, etc.). So to presume that people coming to the exhibition would not “look-at” the #occupy | #15M movement space expecting something to “happen” was a wrong way to focus public participation in the Biennale. It was wrong to believe people would simply join because they had the need to, to expect that a building could reproduce the process of the squares as public space, to think that things “would” happen naturally when the process itself was artificial, not in a pejorative sense, only to describe that it needed a parti-



From Enrique Flores' sketchbook of 15M at the Puerta del Sol (at 4ojos.com).

cular input from the people occupying the space. This input, or driving force, happened organically when people organized in squares because there was a moral or political (maybe even material) motivation to do so.

At the same time, the intention of the curators to stay out of the process has not worked as planned. It is not possible to play in both sides, to present a self-organized space with constraints, because it really belongs to the exhibition set; the relation of power between curator and “occupy” could not be diluted. Every now and then it appeared in the scene and no reaction to that situation ever occurred.

● Fear of being “exhibited”

The Asambleas – Asamblea madness, as something untouchable, fixed, un-redo-able, is the belief that an Asamblea is something other than a tool (amongst others) for coordination and decision-making. To pretend that in an assembly it is necessary to have everybody that may have participated in previous assemblies is not being inclusive. Anyone that passes by can make a decision, and there is no need to wait for a “specially implicated” person if he or she is a “leader.” If people can attend, great, and if not they have to assume it will progress without them. That leads sometimes to difficult situations, but it is how a square works, under the belief that everybody is a part of it and can participate. The other essential thing is trust. Decisions must be taken even if we are not present. One has to rely on the group, on the decision taken during an Asamblea where people discuss and add nuances and arguments. We can’t fossilize decisions to what

was decided in the past. The building of a square is something alive, continuously changing, and as decisions change, needs change, and there is nothing that can be guaranteed forever except that every decision can be re-thought.

In the Biennale, the scheduled Asambleas were not respected in the first weeks. Nobody attended, so that gives a clue of the commitment towards the collective building process, Nobody had the need to talk about the conflicts, to look for solutions, the international status of things, or anything. In the name of assemblies, decisions were not accepted...

The Fear – This fear leads us to several uncommon behaviors, such as remaining silent when intolerable behavior took place, to respect the established roles of being “guests of an institution” and having to respect the rules even if they make no sense in our context, to fear to discuss and debate when there is censorship around certain topics, restricting certain debates just to Germans because the “outsiders” would not understand the German context. Instead of understanding that building a global movement means explaining contexts, decoding ideas that can be obvious for the local people but not for the others. A wall appeared once more. A “we” and a “you” were created, dialogue stopped flowing; one is right, the other is wrong, no exchange is possible, positions are fixed. This cannot be part of a #square, where there are no previous truthful statements, everything is under construction, everything can be questioned and solutions are built based on the discussions taking place.

An Individual or Collective Process? – A thing that happened during the organization of the “event,” was that not even a

thought was given to the building of a commons: of a common space, of a common working place, of a common goal. The square was a container, a check-in of projects that were individually shown at an exhibition. Why and how did that happen? Perhaps it's not an easy question to answer, while our mouths are full of words like collective, collaboration, our practices are very distant from them. In the end there was a lack of political maturity in the group, the tension between being or not being part of the whole exhibition lead to the situation of finally presenting the "visitors" with an exhibition, a model of what is supposed to be a square which is very far from reality.

● *Asamblea madness*

People belonging to the so-called occupy movement, with more voice than the rest, seem interested mainly in putting their name on the walls of a famous art exhibition that will guarantee some extra rewards once it is added to their CV, and forgetting that one of the basic principles of the movement is to avoid personal profit.

Social networks present a fundamentally historical perspective, involving people and their relationships. The success of the Spanish Revolution takes root in the social fabric of the population. One can't just decide to MAKE THE SQUARE and expect this social fabric to be of any quality. Building networks takes time, effort, and participants. But the Occupy Biennale square –a literal one, enclosed between strong walls– doesn't invite anyone from outside its physical boundaries...

Conclusions – The construction of an artificial square has failed. But it's good to see why and understand the process. First of all, to escape the logic of exhibitions and institutions is not possible; we can interact with them, we can do some lobbying so that some things change, but what is not possible is to develop a process of true freedom inside them (as the ones lived in the squares). A square has no limits, no

● *There was a lack of political maturity in the group*

restrictions, while an exhibition has, even if there is a different purpose, to establish a border between the "proper" exhibition and the #occupy space. When problems appear, such the lack of space, they have to be solved within the predefined and limited space, without it being possible to "disturb" other parts of the exhibition. The concept of what role was played by every part in the exhibition cannot be questioned, and finally there is a curatorial frame, so the #OccupyBiennale had its cage, and when it was found that it didn't accomplish the needs of all the "occupiers," a "ba-



Oliver Ressler filming members of the Asamblea of Tetuan, Madrid, March 2012.

tle" for space started that could only be solved by having people leave.

An inclusive space could not be made, not just for this, but also for the political views and aims of the people most involved, for discussions about conflicts, but also solutions, experiences, a "lecture" based space, where collective intelligence could be felt. There is a lot to be learned about collective processes, when the people are in the squares, where a high percentage of the population is involved. It means a deep social change. In the end this means changing social rules, it means changing our own positions, even when we may think they are the best and obviously so, it opens a space for questioning the unquestionable. Those kinds of changes we never know when or why they happen, they are spontaneous and unpredictable.

● *We are not playing games*

Meanwhile we should be able to remember that we are not playing games, nor playing assemblies, nor squares. People are suffering. The causes are many injustices due to social welfare being destroyed and they will get worse and affect even the "rich" countries. People are dying daily fighting for freedom and food. Activism is not a goal, something to be done in our spare time. The goal is to change and disrupt the logic of the system, to build a new world, not to carry out a process with no goal. A global movement is taking place outside and many countries are really searching for alternatives and for the first time in history, knowledge is more distributed. There are tools to put it in common, technologies to facilitate information, communication and decision-making, and they can be on our side if we defend them. So while the old system is collapsing, we have the opportunity to build global change and a better world for everyone. Shall we do it?

To forget fear we have to feel free and this did not happen in the #OccupyBiennale.

Response from an activist from #OccupyBerlin

by Florian Zacharias Raffel

Carolina, I like your critical review about the #occupy space and I hope there will start a discussion about the topics you put in a focus: human issues, the fear or the individual or collective process. All this is part of groupbuilding and I think that this is the core of our movement to deal with all human issues as well beside the political work. When we learn to live together, when we learn how to deal with everyday issues among men and women within a group, when we find solutions then we can create trust and mutual support that will become the foundation of our political work...

About the 7th Berlin Biennale Project I am missing one major information: Berlin's camp was shut down, so we needed a new base, a new location for us to meet and work. This is the core of the occupy biennale, an open space of 500 qm for the political work of #occupy and #15M in Berlin. And it was clear that this would be an experiment...

At berlinbiennale.de/blog/en/comments/an-open-letter-to-occupybiennale-31367

Response from an activist from #OccupyMuseums (New York)

by Noah Fischer

A few weeks ago, I thought that the 7th Berlin Biennale had constructed a kind of tomb where movements would come to die. Arriving in early June, we encountered exactly a human zoo, a position from which activated activism felt impossible. It seemed that an anemic representation of the movement was being exhibited and consumed by an audience; rather than occupying, we were being occupied by the institution. Also, the "global" activist community appeared surprisingly nationalistic and was blocking itself in various ways which Carolina details, leading to a culture of degeneration. For example, I witnessed an "activist" call the police on someone else to settle a dispute, which created a pleasing spectacle for the art audience. So my initial experience when we arrived was very close to Carolina's picture and I was angry with the curators and wondered if anything helpful for the movements could come from the 7th Berlin Biennale. I even wondered how much damage the 7th Berlin Biennale would do to the movements.

However, after a two-week experience in Berlin, I have two questions to offer to her assessment. The first: is the goal of growing a healthy square on the model of Puerta del Sol or Liberty Park an appropriate measure for the 7th Berlin Biennale? Certainly a museum exhibition with "star" curators and with time limits is a strange place to set up an inclusive

public square. And one that is funded by the German government is an even stranger place to invite members of 15M protesting austerity! Also, at least in New York, the #square stage of the movement passed months ago, partially because the logic of squares created problems in themselves and we are busy trying to understand how the post-square stage can work. So here, perhaps we could have started, not finished, from the conclusion that a "free square" wouldn't be likely. This would lead to the question concerning the other strategies we can follow with the resources available here. It turned out that we found many tactics and some of them started with leaving behind the pure square model in search of hybrids.

● *A pleasing spectacle for the art audience*

The second question: Is it possible to pronounce an experiment a failure halfway through? This question touches on the "space of possibility," which I think is kind of the bread and butter of the movements--another world is possible! (despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary). In my experience with Occupy Wall Street, you've got to trust the moment, even when it twists and turns out of control. Sometimes, for example, the moments when police exerted the most force - like that day of 700 arrests on the Brooklyn Bridge - the dispiriting situation quickly flipped around into a win for the movement. I feel like our involvement in this global movement, which is responding to 30 + years of Neo-Liberalism, is like scratching around for hidden pathways, secret allies, magic tactics within an extensive fortress-city. So maybe looking for new spheres in which to act, using new tactics, without giving up, keeping the space of possibility open despite all logic, despite absurdity, is a strong position to take.

● *Is it possible to pronounce an experiment a failure halfway through?*

So what did we do with the situation? After the initial shock of finding ourselves in a human zoo, I/we began to respond. What was first needed was to address the power hierarchy of the zoo and flip the situation so that we could regain our dignity. An international group of activists attempted this through a series of semiotic guerrilla actions (naming the curators publicly for example) and holding meetings which culminated in a proposal (which was accepted) for the former curators and director to step back. Our logic: to invite and exhibit the movements was not a bad thing in itself, but only a first step, and one that would naturally lead to degenera-



In Zuccotti Park October, 2011. Photo by Charlie Finch.

tion if it stopped there. It was necessary for the institution to “go farther into the concept,” pushing the 7th Berlin Biennale structurally in a horizontal direction to make their invisible frame visible and put it under question. To accomplish this, we were leveraged by the strength of our group, by the public “failure” of the Biennial thus far (leading perhaps to desperation and willingness), and by allies in the press. The proposal was consensed upon in a simple version by the Biennale staff, and an experiment about the limits of activism in relation to institutions was initiated.

● *A human zoo*

As we walked into the muddy waters of open meetings and the realization that in the short time we had, we could probably accomplish very little concrete changes within the institution (some of us wanted to support the guards in raising their 6.5 euros/hour salary for example), we did notice (not only occupiers but guards and staff too) that we got a lot of our dignity back. Things began to move. New allies emerged from all sides and we began to work together in groups that broke the boundaries of “occupiers” and “institution.” The former curators who at first seemed like our zookeepers became kind of

collaborators, maybe even activists. Interesting collaborations were proposed and attempted. Could we use the 7th Berlin Biennale institutional name to pull off even stronger actions, hacking the ambiguity and class-relation of culture in service to the movement? We also used tools from the #square such as general assemblies, working groups, and our consensus process, but this move toward horizontality was not a “pure square model” but hybrid territory. We are conscious that as we play out this experiment we are also developing tactics that can be shared for future hybrids that transgress many lines. A “continuity working group” is busy planning such future hybrids.

So far, I would not call the experience in Berlin a success. I don’t think there is such a thing in this movement. Part of what we are doing is moving beyond a striving for success in the way we previously defined it (mostly through acquisition of money or status). But neither can I say that it was a failure. We entered a space of tension and possibility, created a kind of interesting mess and many people are now busy developing this mess collectively. It is possible that this is simultaneously a process of cooption of our movement and also the discovery of secret passageways in the fortress. Let the global movement be everywhere, attempt everything. We’ll see what happens next.

How to Build Up **Horizontality**

by Communication

Berlin, July 2012

A group of activists who participated in the 7th Berlin Biennale made this text with the idea of giving it to the workers of the KW [Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art] and all public institutions or organizations who want more knowledge about making decisions in a horizontal way. We are interested in this document being opened up to a larger community for use, as well.

1. BASIS

2. ORGANIZATION

2.1. Decide democratically.

The minorities do not decide for you.

2.2. Praxis of horizontality.

2.3. Tools for horizontality.

3. ALWAYS HORIZONTAL

4. REFERENCES

BASIS

The structure of a society is based on its acceptance by the people. If society decides to change and gets organized to do so, change is inevitable. In this scenario, any attempt by those in power to try to stop the change is illegitimate. If the majority decides to implement this change, it has to be done.

The main strategy of the system is to define “how things are”, or this is the only “reality” with a very specific image that always matches the current state of society. The system also attempts to make the people believe that any change is impossible or harmful.

Horizontality is a struggle to make possible what was once considered impossible.

ORGANIZATION

Speak, speak, speak. Make the word fill everything. All opinions have to be heard. All information needs to be com-

municated. Let people debate. Always keep active listening. Listen, listen, listen.

Differences can be understood one to each other. If we don't listen, we won't go far, if everyone does their own revolution, all will fail. Debates shouldn't turn into fights over who is right. Active listening is always enacted in order to understand what the other wants to say, whether we like it or not. Let the ideas be the protagonists and not the people.

- ***Speak, speak, speak.
Make the word fill
everything***

Active listening is the opposite of passivity. It goes beyond the simple attention and respect, which are fundamental but not sufficient. Active listening is not simply wait your turn to speak carefully. It is a genuine attitude of understanding what the others are saying and why, and then building from what was said. Encourage everyone to ask about what was not understood, seek alternative viewpoints in order to strengthen or change outcomes of arguments and deepen the level of debate.

The aim is that everyone understands all ideas in order to participate in the collective intelligence. This means we can all use our specific way of speaking but we can also try to use a simple language where everyone fits.

One problem we found working in a horizontal way (asamblea/assembly) is that, some people take the asamblea to be some kind of “trade union” to which they come to present their problems when they have them, and wait for the group to find solutions. Of course the group is in charge for solving problems, but all the members of it must engage, and work together, actively. Not only focusing on their own problems and waiting for solutions in a passive way (this is also part of our old mentality: the “system”, the institutions, our boss, have to solve our lives, we are just spectators, bricks in their wall, “there isn't anything we can do” kind of thinking or mentality.

Therefore the time and work used in a horizontal system is part of community life and the process to find solutions to common and individual problems. There isn't a loss or waste of time, is a necessary investment for the flow of communication and decision-making between the people.

1. Decide democratically.**The minorities do not decide for you.**

When we are making decisions we want to get everyone to express their opinion, especially differing views. Let the discussions be conducted, try to reformulate the positions and seek consensus among opinions. Not all positions are synthesized in a single position.

The minority dissent is collected and can have their own course and build their spaces (some of their work afterwards can possibly become the majority), but dissenting voices shouldn't block out the majority. The consensus (which is the milestone of the process) should not be confused with unanimity. Unanimity could be required for some specific (very sensitive or determining) decisions. But it is certainly quite paralyzing, we have to avoid repeating the same mistake of the system of letting the interest of 1% weigh over the 99%.

Decisions can always be reconsidered again whenever people want and justify it. So there is no problem in making the wrong decision. The paralysis caused by the fear of doing so is much more dangerous than making a 'wrong' move or decision. Wrong decisions sometimes prove to have challenging outcomes but can be productive anyway.

Basis of horizontality: Don't prefer your individual position just to prove you are right but consider what is best for the whole group.

2. Praxis of horizontality***-Open and silent space***

The Assembly is a forum for exchange of opinions, feelings, thoughts ... therefore it is important that we understand that it's not just a place to be heard, but to learn how to listen. It is therefore metaphorical space of silence where words and individual ideas have to flow from one to another to end up building something together. Generally we gather in a circle so that we can all see each other better and therefore communicate more fully.

-Roles

There are certain roles that are essential for the proper functioning of an assembly. The structure of an assembly starts by having a moderator, a person who writes the report or minutes and one person who takes 'stack' which means - collects the list of people who want to speak and then calls on them when it is their turn to speak.

-Signals

There is a whole set of signals that help the development of an assembly. These signals help people to express their opinion on what is being said without interrupting the speaker. For exam-

ple if you agree you can shake hands up, if you disagree shake hands down, you can block a decision making a cross with arms or ask for a turn to speak raising your hand.

3. Tools for horizontality

General assembly: the place where people bring their information on what they have been doing in the work groups, committees and the latest news on what has happened.

There are different types of assemblies: Neighborhood, informational, emotional self-reflection, theoretical, single-issue meetings...

Working groups: Group of people who come together to work on related topics and proposals for the collective. Working group meetings can have elements of functionality like the assembly in order to function efficiently and also to communicate at a high level. We can utilize moderator roles, time keepers, stack takers etc.

● ***People who think similarly
don't have a need for
bureaucratic structures***

Affinity groups: This type of group motivates people to get used to organized groups and when they have an idea begin to carry that out. In many cases affinity groups, groups of friends or people who think similarly don't have a need for bureaucratic structures. Not only is this more effective and often prevents possible destructive attitudes when ideas are not yet fully mature, but also promotes an active attitude toward life and society and can produce more fundamental change.

Workshops and debates: spaces for knowledge sharing. Workshops, debates and discussions can have elements of the assembly as its structure. Elements such as moderation, stack taking and minutes - even if there is a presenter. After the presentation the discussion can function in a horizontal mode including the presenter in the circle.

Breakout groups: In all the meetings breakout groups are a tool that can be helpful to focus discussions on solutions and come to a greater understanding of the issues at hand. When a smaller amount of people are able to concentrate their efforts then come back to the entire group and report back the findings it can be very constructive.

Spokes council: These meetings can take place with Affinity Groups, Caucus' and Working groups. One person from each group sits at the front of the circle in the Spokes Council but they are backed by their Group or Caucus. That single person cannot make decisions for the group. They are there to speak for the group. At times, they will need to confer with their

group and then to reflect the collective voice of the group back to the Spokes Council. This individual can be changed in the middle of the meeting as the group they represent can chose to recall them at any time. This individual is meant to rotate from meeting to meeting not repeatedly being the same person over and over.

Horizontality and working in a network makes dismantling of the structure very difficult. Anyone can propose anything without going through a specific mechanism, power structure, or permit. The absence of leaders is important mainly for people to understand that they are the ones who can decide together.

Encourage people to participate, tell them that the group needs their help. people are needed through all skill sets.

<http://www.occupybb7.org/node/358>

Rome: Teatro Valle Occupato

On 14 June 2011, Lavoratrici e Lavoratori dello Spettacolo, a group of workers of art and entertainment, film / theater / dancers / technicians, occupied the Teatro Valle to save it from an uncertain future. The occupiers issued an appeal signed by over 8,000 people. Citizens, artists, professionals, workers, people of Italian and international culture, gave life to the Teatro Valle, that has emerged as a venue with a strong symbolic value at a national level, a place to share ideas and experiences, a place to elaborate together a political and critical thought, according to a choice of active citizenship.

From the confrontations that came out of the public assemblies during these weeks, it became clear that the Teatro Valle must remain public and be recognized and protected as a common, with a subjective right and fundings dedicated to its management, in legal forms as a public body or a foundation. Regarding the artistic vocation of Teatro Valle we think it should be a center devoted to the Italian Contemporary Dramaturgy...

The occupants have sent a letter to President Giorgio Napolitano, asking him to support the initiative.

The occupants are aware of the present economical and financial difficulties of the country and, precisely for this reason, they believe that the situation should be faced not with a blind policy of cuts, but with forward-looking projects aiming to reduce waste and to enhance the artistic talents which are a key resource for the country.

A renewed future for Teatro Valle would be a major starting point for everybody, ushering a new season of Italian culture

policy resetting art, knowledge and creativity as center of the social system. Radical reforms capable of ensuring efficiency and autonomy in the public management, would allow virtuous actions of the privates and would restore dignity to the professionals of this industry with specific laws recognising their rights.

● *A blind policy of cuts*

With the support of Ugo Mattei, Professor of Civil Law at the University of Turin and author of the referendum questionnaire on Water (voted on by the Italians one month ago), we are imagining new forms of ethical management able to provide the possibility of a plural artistic direction with the guarantee of a turnover; an “ecological” principle ensuring a balanced distribution of resources between small and large productions, for training and hospitality; fairness in pay reduction of the gap between the minimum and maximum, a price policy accessible and progressive; boards for independent monitoring, transparency and readability of financial statements published on the web, developing a code of ethics, as model for all theaters and companies.

From Rome, July 5, 2011, “Teatro Valle Occupato: Proposal for a New Teatro Valle” (collective text?) at teatrovalleoccupato.it/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Press_Valle_Occupato_inglese-doc1.pdf



Rome's Oldest Theater

by Alberto Mucci

When a group of artists took over the Teatro Valle, Rome's oldest theater, in June 2011, nobody thought they would last long. Yet the artists, actors and crew members who first barricaded themselves in Valle soon grew into a crowd of fierce Occupiers who under the national media spotlight became the country's foremost anti-austerity crusaders.

Caught by surprise, Rome Mayor Gianni Alemanno decided to wait out the Occupiers in a game of chicken. Alemanno was so sure the Occupiers would fail that he offered to pay for Valle's water and electricity bills. But events did not turn out as the mayor had hoped. Today, around 50 activists live inside Valle and have virtual control over every aspect of its management. An even wider group of sympathizers is involved in organizing free weekly events ranging from the staging of plays by lesser-known artists to performances by up-and-coming musicians to discussions open to the public.

The past year has brought a great number of Italian theaters into the political spotlight in what might be considered the country's parallel to the Spanish indignados or the Occupy Wall Street movement. Though two different efforts to kick-start an Italian version of the indignados failed—the first large one taking place in June and the second in late October of 2011—the ongoing Valle occupation is a unique response to the austerity crisis crippling much of Europe's economy.

Before the occupation, Valle was controlled by the Ente Teatrale Italiano, the institute that managed Italian theaters until it was abolished by the 2011 austerity bill passed by Silvio Berlusconi's late government. As the institute closed down, politicians and city officials scrambled to determine how the theater would now be managed.

At first the Valle was taken over by the Ministry of Culture, which floated the idea of selling it to the private sector. Some proposed selling the theater to Slow Food, an organization that bills itself as promoting "the pleasure of good food with a commitment to the community and the environment," and turning the theater into a restaurant. Others tapped the possible interest of popular Italian writer Alessandro Baricco to manage the theater—a solution Occupiers quickly rebutted, believing Baricco to be too tied to politics.

Matteo Bianchini, 24, an engineering student at Sapienza University of Rome and one of the 50 people currently occupying

the Valle, explains: "We are not against the concept of privatization. What we don't want is a form of privatization that only benefits [those who are] already rich. A privatization that is done by politicians for politicians. We decided we had to end that vicious cycle and take control of the theater ourselves in order to give it back to the people and the community."

Today, similar occupations are underway at four other major theaters in Palermo, Catania, Venice and Rome, along with smaller theaters around the country. Over the past year, these scattered initiatives have become a single intertwined reality that has created a perpetual cycle of plays, shows, exhibitions and talks that move through the occupied stages of Italian cities.

● *The country's foremost anti-austerity crusaders*

"I could expect something like this happening in Germany, the U.K or the Netherlands. Never in Italy," says Cecilia Sacchi, 22, a theater major originally from Milan. "It's a sign of the times: People are not okay with what is going on at the moment and this occupation is an attempt to find an answer to the current crisis."

In many ways, it's not the occupation's endurance that makes it unique. Italy is home to a number of ongoing occupations. Forte Prenestino in Rome's western outskirts, established in 1986, is Europe's largest squat. What differentiates Valle and its spin-offs is that the activists have decided to institutionalize the occupation—in other words, they are following the bureaucratic path to become recognized as a formal entity. This choice represents a leap from traditional occupations in Italy, the great majority of which intentionally remain in a comfortable legal limbo, juridical non-entities whose existence is guaranteed solely by the paternalistic concession of the authorities.

But the Valle, along with the other occupied theaters, is on its way to becoming a "Fondazione," an Italian word used to describe non-profit institutions whose cause is generically defined by Italian law as an "entity with the aim of pursuing a form of social good." In pursuing such a path, the activists have been engaged in a long bureaucratic battle. To be recognized as a national foundation one must raise €250,000 (about \$300,000), sign papers in front of a notary and prepare a "constitution" that must then be implemented at all levels of the organization.

Valle's struggle is at the forefront of a battle that transcends Italian national boundaries: a movement to redefine what is legally classified as a "common good." According to the Italian Civic Code—which shares similarities with the laws of most European countries—a "common good" describes an entity such as water or air or sunshine "that can be subjected to a collective right."

The Valle Occupiers, with the help of the Italian attorney Stefano Rodotà, are pushing the Italian Parliament and Senate to change the current definition to include a non-tangible entity like culture as a "common good" to which every citizen has a right. The activists hope that under such a definition, the Teatro Valle and many other theaters like it will become entities owned by everybody, which the state will not be able to sell or privatize at its own whim....

From "OccupateilTeatro: The stage is set for Italy's version of Occupy Wall Street," September 4, 2012 at inthesetimes.com/article/13641/occupateilteatro/

[Since mid-2011], re-appropriation of goods that once have been public or devoted to culture and education has been a growing trend in Italy. This was a reaction not only to Berlusconi, but to the culture he has generated over decades of commercial television and which has been renamed **Berlusconismo**. Occupations of movie houses and libraries - to reclaim cultural venues as public goods - have been flourishing in small villages and big cities alike. The most significant started June 14, 2011, at Teatro Valle, an 18th century theatre at the heart of Rome, where Sarah Bernhardt's company used to perform...

"'Occupy' culture enters Roman theatre: As a result of privatisation and downsizing, Italian communities have taken culture into their own hands," November 16, 2011 by Donatella Della Ratta at aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/201111161156688320.html

"The role of the artist is to make revolution irresistible."

We are workers within the fields of art and knowledge. On June 14, 2011, we occupied the Teatro Valle, the oldest theater in Rome, to save it from privatization and to denounce the state of emergency of Italian culture and politics.

During these past seven months of the occupation of the Valle, we have been experimenting, pushing the limits of legality, to create an environment of participation and cultural production, which goes beyond the administrative governance and the logic of profit. The 13th of January we entered a second delicate and passionate phase: the construction of a legal, artistic, and economic instrument based on cooperation, on a participatory management and self governance, which would transform the struggle into a bottom-up and continuous

act of creation. Through a widespread public shareholding campaign, we are collecting the necessary funds to realize a Foundation for the Valle Theater as a Common.

This is a unique experiment, the outcome of which is not obvious, and we will need everyone to get involved: from the artists and intellectual workers, to the individual citizens from the networks that in these recent months have supported the practices of the Commons.

The Teatro Valle is a theater with a long European historical significance and relevance: through the future Foundation we would like to preserve the theater's international nature, which we want now to be informed by all the groups, bodies and experiences of dissent that pursue this fight at a European level.

If we win this battle, the Foundation Valle as a Common will be the first European institution to be operated on a principle of self governance. It could then serve as a model in different sectors, as a bold and risky experiment of creating a political laboratory for all.

We invite you to join us and get involved in this passionate struggle!

To become a member send a check made payable to...

– January 13, 2012 – Foundation Campaign Teatro Valle Bene Comune, at teatrovalleoccupato.it/become-member-of-fondazione-teatro-valle-bene-comune



Theater Occupation Wave

by Alessia Zabatino

• **Venice** – Marinoni Theatre occupied in September 2011 by a group of Venetian knowledge workers (who already manage two spaces in Venice: S.a.L.E. Docks and Laboratorio Occupato Morion), students and the occupants of Valle Theatre during the famous Festival of Cinema because it had been allocated 37 million euros to build the new Cinema Palace. It was only a speculation and the palace was never built, while in the same area the beautiful Marinoni Theater was crumbling to ruins.

• **Milan** – PAC (Contemporary Art Pavilion) temporarily occupied the 3rd December 2011 by a group of Art Workers of Milan and the occupants of Valle Theatre and Marinoni Theatre to talk about culture as commons and the precariousness of the knowledge workers

• **Catania** – Coppola Theatre, the first municipal theater in the city turned into a warehouse and closed since World War II, occupied in December 2011 by a group of Sicilian art and culture workers. The occupants consider the occupation like a liberation of the theatre and they delivered the space with the intention to build an independent place to artistic and professional training, to share their professional skills and to turn them into material goods for the community

• **Naples** – Madre Museum temporarily occupied the 29th January 2012 by a Neapolitan collective of performing art and immaterial workers and by the occupants of Valle, Marinoni and Coppola Theatres and the Art Workers from Milan. The occupation happened to do a public assembly about the different experiences of occupations and to talk about culture as commons also with academics and lawyers.

• **Naples** – Ex Asilo Filangieri occupied in March 2012 by La Balena, Neapolitan collective of performing art and immaterial workers. The place is an historic palace in the centre of the city renovated with the investment of 8 million euro to be the location of the Universal Forum of Cultures in 2013. Before the event the palace is supposed to host and produce cultural events, but after the opening it was no longer used except as a place of some administrative offices of the Forum.

• **Palermo** – Garibaldi Theatre, built in XIX century, that has always alternated periods of use and disuse (until becoming a venue for illegal boxing matches). It restored in 2008 with the investment of 4,5 million euro, but inexplicably closed. It has occupied in April 2012 by a group of Sicilian knowledge workers, the occupants of Coppola and Valle Theatre.

• **Palermo** – Cinema inside Cantieri della Zisa occupied by a group of Sicilian knowledge workers in April 2012. The Cantieri della Zisa is a dismissed industrial area, recovered to be the site of cultural activities, but the Cinema (the only one public in the city) was closed from 4 years....

● To combine advanced forms of conflict with the ability to build consensus

The groups of occupants recognize a similarity with the Arab spring, the Occupy movement, the Spanish Indignados, but in Italy these groups form a network, not a movement. They defined themselves “constituent groups” i.e. they don’t aspire to be a minority, but they aspire to have a large representation of citizenship, to combine advanced forms of conflict with the ability to build consensus and participation by different parts of population...

– May 2012, at edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/protecting-and-enhancing-commons/mis-sion_case/legitimate-illegality-culture-commons-journey-through-0

Pisa: What Teatro Rossi Aperto Can Do

U. Volli. *‘Theatre and photography’*

*An agora where we can meet
The theater doesn’t exist any longer,
we don’t have any more representation,
the social normality of pretending is absent.
The big machine to see is blind,
and send us back only the glittering of our look,
so as to say, the camera.
The theater is now a black mirror,
his seduction is his availability.
What it is, it is to be seen,
and so, ultimately, it is not.*

Since last June, Italy has been hit by a wave of theatre occupations : they have been run by a pluralistic management so as to hand back to the citizenry something belonging to her.

Today, we, students and workers in the entertainment fields, have decided to open and set free from dust and silence Teatro Ernesto Rossi, because we are fed up with being precarious subjectivities, unrecognized categories, people who day after day, see their present more and more impoverished and their future more and more in danger.

We are tired of the ruling class overbearingness, of the crystallization of the present state, of lacking the financial support to culture. We are weary to be subordinated to seasonal trends to beg an income, to be blackmailed by favoritism and privatization.

We are not resigned.

We are here to reaffirm that beyond and against the crisis there are people and energies moving, ready to challenge themselves, imaging and experimenting new artistic languages and different ways of getting together.

We want to practice an horizontal management of one of the most beautiful theaters of this area . Breaking into the present state is the only way we can get hold of our time, no matter of productivity diktats and labor market rules.

Let's create a physical and mental landscape where mistake and desire are regarded as possibility.

Like in Palermo, Roma, Napoli, Catania, Ostia, up to Venice and Milano, we have decided to perform a desiring act : open this theatre, a common wealth of our city, otherwise abandoned to a slow death. Located in an important spot, in front of the faculty of Literature, it should be the beating heart of university life.

We have studied for a long time this social fabric.

We fight back council politics attempting to make Pisa a window shop for tourists, detached from our desires. The desires of citizens, migrants, students who actually live in this city. For instance, to choose to buy CCTV instead of supporting arts and culture.

We refuse the logic of big events, propaganda and emptiness.

We look for places where immaterial production come from real sharing of ideas and behavior. We want to start from a theatre, symbol of a spring of a culture revolution. Knowledge must be approached in a different way: a non- hierarchical and partisan one. We conceive culture as a knowledge that raises beyond the closed university walls, academies and dead stages.

The constituent power of us must get a key role in an agora where we can meet, discuss, and discover ourselves.

This is an atelier of ideas, a cauldron of sparkling energies where contamination rules. This is our nature : a movement in fieri, dynamic, open and careful to people needs.

This act is here to show that battles are not only for heroes and things have to be changed HERE AND NOW.

To be continued...

September 27, 2012 at teatrovalleoccupato.it/pisa-what-teatro-rossi-aper-to-can-do-a-place-where-we-could-meet-thursday-09-27



“We Are Not from the Moon”

Report of a Political Theater Experiment

by D.B.

On December 14, 2010, the city of Rome saw a huge demonstration. The core of demonstrators consisted of students from the secondary schools and universities, but they were joined by precarious workers, artists, environmentalists, immigrants, social and political activists, people fighting for gender and transgender rights, families struggling for the right to having a house and many others. The demonstration had been triggered by the feared reform of the educational system, but the attitude itself of the Berlusconi's last government had fed social tension until it burst.

Like many others, I was there. As a precarious worker, as a woman, as a social activist who defines her beliefs to pertain roughly to those social centers which come from the tradition of autonomous communists of the 1970s. At that time I was living in Bologna and was a militant in one of the oldest social centers, the TPO (Teatro Polivalente Occupato), where I joined the independent radio project (radiokairos.it). I had organized my own theater company and I shared my political thoughts, worries, ideas and projects.

It has often been said that artists join social centers not because of their political beliefs but because in social centers they can find what is not available in the mainstream circuit: cheap space for their rehearsals and some kind of network which might help them in being better known. In my case things were more complicated. I have always been a performer and an activist, and never tried to divide the two sides of my coin. I was an activist through my performances and a performer through the mise en scene of my political thoughts.

While we could say that demonstrations are huge performances, I was not performing on December 14. I was demonstrating with my comrades, friends, brothers and sisters, against a government that didn't represent me and that, in my opinion, was behaving against the interest of the country.

The outcomes of that day of struggle are known. The reform was approved by the parliament and Berlusconi resigned only ten months later. One could say we lost. But “the movement,” right after the demonstration, didn't feel anything like that. We realized we were many, united, and powerful. This demonstration was actually able to gather almost all the different areas of the movement, which hadn't happened

for a long time. Many people started recalling the days of the Social Forum in Genova in 2001. The link was so strong that in quite a few of the reports that followed people felt the need to specify if they were, or were not, in Genova.

For several days, the demonstration was in newspapers and on TV. They were afraid. It had not been a small group of extremists, it was a whole part of the citizenry, and it was perceived as potentially dangerous for the status quo. Soon the media began to describe the demonstrators as potential terrorists, violent persons, outsiders who go to demonstrations only because they want to destroy the city.

We all knew it was simply false, but the power of media was overwhelming. At that point we realized we needed to write down our own version of the story. It was necessary to share our own vision of that day, we couldn't leave the narration in the hands of the others.

● *It was necessary to share our own vision of that day*

It was a massive and quick flow. Twelve hours after the demonstration, websites and fanzines were already filled in with the stories of several people who had joined the demonstration. Personal stories, brief tales, subjective points of views – colorful and powerful voices added new pieces to the mainstream story.

A few days after the demonstration we called for a big assembly in the main room of the TPO, gathering all those from Bologna who had joined the demonstration. It was snowing. I remember we were happy, some were cleaning the entrance of snow, and many were laughing and speaking about our incredible day of fight. In that very moment I understood what I should do. During the assembly I took the floor and shared my idea: a theater monologue, based on the stories of the people that were in Rome on December 14. It was the first time I saw so much support for a theatrical experience inside a political environment. We were enthusiastic.

“We said goodnight, but nobody went to sleep” – That's what I said to Giuseppe when I realized, in the aftermath of December 14, that so many people, instead of going to bed after the demonstration, had started writing and publishing their

reports on that day. This sentence soon became the slogan of our show. I convinced Giuseppe to join my adventure. He and I were not so close at that time. We knew each other because we had participated to several demonstrations and assemblies together. I liked the humble and concrete way Peppe had of approaching all the political issues we faced. I was “the actress” and he, apart from being an electronic musician, was in charge of the technical supplies of our stage.

● *“We said goodnight, but nobody went to sleep”*

The night of the 17th, during the party that followed our assembly, we shared our thoughts of how the show should be. He agreed to create a soundtrack, to support me in the mise en scene and to take charge of all the technical aspects of the performance. The name of our show would be “Non vengo dalla luna” – “I don’t come from the moon.” We chose this title because, while speaking with people who weren’t activists, we often felt like aliens. Friends and relatives got stuck on the huge difference they found between our tales and the stories they were reading in newspapers. We claimed and asserted our rights to be an active part of the society and the country. We were not aliens telling stories of a different planet. Peppe and I opened our diaries that night and fixed our first brainstorming meeting. The night was young. We raised up our glasses to celebrate our new societies and then danced and sang with our friends and comrades.

Three months of hard work and tensions started. Gathering the tales, building a real script, rehearsing, creating an original soundtrack, mistakes, fears, the need to share the outcomes with others. At the same time, Peppe and I were sharing our personal points of view, trying to find our common words. It was a real experiment of co-creation, hard sometimes, but rich, intense and deep. In these three months we never felt alone. We knew it was not our private delirium. We were working on reality, creating materials for a different point of view, far from the official one. And we had the support of our comrades, friends, brothers and sisters.



Masked demonstrators in Poland.

We decided to have our debut in Padua, where Radio Sherwood, the oldest independent radio station in Italy, is located. Born in the 1970’s, Radio Sherwood has always been close to the autonomous movement. Performances, concerts and debates are often organized in the building that hosts the radio. It was the beginning of March. A few minutes before going on the stage, Peppe and me were panicking. We feared people would not feel represented anymore by their own words. We feared it was useless.

Well, it wasn’t like that. Not at all. After our debut we played about 30 times in less than four months, reaching most of the social centers around Italy. Two years have passed and I still don’t understand how we managed to do it. It simply happened. We performed in Padova on March 5th and we had already fixed a couple of dates for the following week. Then, people started calling and writing to us. “Hi, we’re from the social center located in... we were in Rome on December 14th, and we saw the streaming of your show in Padua. We would love to have it in our place. Can you come?” “We are a group of students coming from... we were in Rome, we heard you are performing a show about that day. Is it possible to host you in our squat?”

● *We couldn’t believe it*

Peppe and me were both working at other projects in order to get to the end of the month. One day we counted our working days and realized we had had no break for more than two months. We were tired, and the money we could earn was never enough. We had decided that, in order to tour the show, we would accept low payment, according to the financial resources of our hosts. We had no professional truck for the tour. We were using our car, stuffing it with the few, essential objects that constituted the scenography and travelling all around Italy.

We were travelling when we heard about the kidnapping and homicide of Vittorio Arrigoni [an Italian writer and activist killed by Salafists in Gaza]. We were travelling during the national strike on May 6th. We were travelling during the big demonstration in Val di Susa on July 2nd, and we were travelling when our brother and comrade E. was taken and tortured by the police. Travelling. Taking our things on the stage. Setting up. Fixing the lights. No matter how poor the place might be. Everything we needed was with us. The story. A few white sheets, some newspapers, a couple of lights. Music. We got changed in toilets, behind bushes, in rehearsal rooms. You ready? Ready. You okay? Okay. Switch the mic on. Let’s go.

And we remember somebody saying: that was the first time I went to the theatre. Somebody claiming: I was not in Rome that day, but you gave me a new point of view, thank you.

In Milan the squat was so new that Peppe had to set up the electric circuit. In Ancona there was an anti-racist football

match close to the stage and the ball almost bumped on my head. In L'Aquila we were performing amongst the ruins of the earthquake. It was so cold I had to keep my coat on. In Naples we had the best pizza ever. In Lioni we had to occupy the main square of the village because the mayor hadn't given the authorization. In Falconara a girl cried, and I cried also, just a little bit. In Rome we met the students from middle schools, and the rebels from Tunisia. Behind us we had all the book blocks. (On December 14th, the students created special plastic shields, each painted with the name of a book, to defend themselves from the police and to demonstrate against the severe cuts to education.) In Bologna all our brothers and sisters were filling in the space so much that I was scared. In Subiaco we were invaded by a flock of flying ants.

But this was life. No proper theater, no useless and expensive stages. No distance between us and our audience. Like during our demonstrations, we were together.

What did we show? What was the point of our small epic? I don't think we wanted to show anything to anybody. We wanted to tell our story, to be ourselves the authors of the tales we were writing through our bodies in the street. We wanted to speak. To ourselves, to the ones we felt close, of course. But also to those who had stayed at home that day, watching the TV and listening to versions that we didn't consider true.

I don't believe we really made the difference. Not for the movement, because it went on following its own well known dynamics, nor for the outside world. Most of the country still looks at activists with fear, disappointment, sometimes a

kind of sympathy but above all from a distance. Newspapers persevere in describing the story of the bad and dangerous guys creating troubles for the rest of the citizenry. The government, most of the times, doesn't open any window for dialogue with us.

● *In Subiaco we were invaded by a flock of flying ants*

But in those four months we met activists, students, squatters, scholars involved in research on social movements, environmentalists, artists, immigrants, men and women who, in their daily life, work hard to make their little world better. We visited squats, social centers, libraries, independent festivals, occupied universities, town hall rooms, youth centers, biodynamic hostels, independent radio stations. We listened, we spent time, we asked questions. Above all, we shared.

After "Non vengo dalla luna," I moved to Asia and here I face issues that are incredibly far from the Italian ones. But if I think about the show there is one word that emerges, and that is sharing. I am sure many others tried before us to do what we experienced: a real co-creation and a deep sharing of content in all the stages of the process – an attempt to let politics and art melt, both in the process and in the outcome. I am sure many others succeeded and will succeed.

Peppe and me, we're doing different things, live in different continents, and have no regrets, no remorse.



Police attack a student demonstration in Turin, Italy.

Squat Fest

Big, popular short-term cultural events – festivals – have long been a principal cultural product of the 1970s occupations. Call it convergence, rendezvous, or festival, these periodic celebrations play key roles in the life of land occupiers, reigniting the excitement and affirming the solidarities of the initial occupation, and the camaraderie of encampment. (See the story of the Amsterdam Balloon Factory of the Dutch free community of Ruigoord in House Magic #4, “Aja Waalwijk on TAZ.”)

The nomadic festivals of the Rainbow Family in the U.S. began in 1968 with a “be-in” in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. The “gatherings” continue to this day on U.S. government park land, a demotic shadow of the upscale Burning Man festivals in the Nevada desert. Governments in the U.S. have never stopped trying to put the lid on these festivals, however.

Michael Niman, author of “People of the Rainbow: A Nomadic Utopia,” maintains a website of numerous documents relating to the group’s struggles with government agencies managing the lands they encamp (see buffalostate.edu/peopleoftherainbow/).

Ryan Neeley, “The Government’s Secret War on Music Festivals” details the trials of Jimmy Tebeau, musician in a Grateful Dead tribute band called The Schwag, who has held numerous festivals on his privately owned land; ownership does not protect these festivals from government harassment (see gratefulweb.com/articles/governments-secret-war-music-festivals).

The 1970s counterculture festival tradition continues in the periodic events organized by urban “art squatters” in Europe. A number of them were held this year.



At the MoRUS - Museum of Reclaimed Spaces - after Hurricane Sandy, NYC.

A FLOP, WITH BEATINGS

In July, an Intersquat Festival was called for late July in Fribourg, Switzerland by a coalition of Swiss groups. The organizers, however, did not hide under cover of culture, but brandished their militancy. They chose to attempt a major occupation as the opening of the festival. Not surprisingly, it was violently suppressed. There were 52 arrests, accompanied by police “batoning anything that moved, including passers-by and people already on the ground, arresting people in cars and trains, in cafes, shopping” – arrestees were swabbed for DNA. It became an exhibition of police violence and a celebration of activist masochism.

call-out for the Fribourg Intersquat Festival – fr.squat.net/2012/07/12/suisse-festival-intersquat-27-07-5-08-et-jusqua-la-fin-du-capitalisme-et-de-son-monde/

event report of the brutal repression – indymedia.org.uk/en/2012/08/498939.html

EMIGRATION, SECESSION, MASS SHOVEL-IN

Festival lies behind the recent strategies of the Dutch Damoclash group, working with the cultural squatters of Schijnheilig. They use the form to make very specific political points. In August of 2011, 50 Dutch artists and activists traveled from Amsterdam to Prishtina, Kosovo. “The Dutch budget cuts and severe police brutality towards squatters and cultural activists in The Netherlands is pushing artists into exile. Therefore we’re seeking asylum in Kosovo.” In July they opened a temporary embassy of the “new Damoclash free state” in the Vondelpark of Amsterdam to prepare the trip.

In September of 2012, the Dutch squatters staged Damoclash, a one-day festival. “Damoclash is a recurring free and chaotic, culturally and non-commercial festival that merges protest art, politics and debate into a fun event.” The target of the temporary occupation was a patch of unbuilt land at Oostpoort, Amsterdam, where a publicly funded development was planned, the kind of mega-project they see as “very risky.”

Under the theme of “Gentrify It Yourself!,” they called people to “Take a shovel in hand, come to Damoclash and



become one of our Cultural Partners (OCP). Show that you want to help build the city of Amsterdam. Come in your builders clothing, safety helmet, lights, battery drill.”

Who are the Damoclash? – nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damoclash

Damoclash: 2011 trip to Kosovo – ourmediaindymedia.blogspot.com.es/2011/07/damoclash-moves-to-kosovodan-ni3t-13.html

Damoclash call-out for 2012 – schijnheilig.org/2012/09/2909-damoclash/

CHARTER OF OCCUPATION

Festival was also themed politically for three days this September with the Festiv’ Aligre, produced by the “Free Commune of Aligre” in Paris. This sudden government was declared by the organizers after local officials denied them a license. The demand was familiar – public participation in the planning decisions that would affect the community. But this faux government first declared themselves “guardians of public disorder” for a period of festival, evoking the oldest traditions of European carnival. Street food, music concerts (all types), story-telling, dance (“garbage ballet”), cycling activities by the collective Vélorution – all are artfully described and intermingled with discussions on “this famous question, how to occupy public space.” These discussions were purposive: to frame a “charter” on how to manifest public space to be “hailed” as the school year starts. Naturally, the project is supported by numerous collectives, the town hall, city and state cultural ministries, and, significantly, the Fondation Abbé Pierre, named for the renowned French squatter priest, and local tenants’ groups.

Festiv’ Aligre – cl-aligre.org/spip/spip.php?article243

Abbé Pierre – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abb%C3%A9_Pierre



“Cop d’ull” (take a look) action by the Colectivo Enmedio in Barcelona: they produced the conference “Cómo acabar con el Mal” (how to end evil) in Spring 2012 (comoacabarconelmal.net).

The Mayfair Squatters

A classic example of the art squat was the 2008 action by the “Mayfair squatters.” This bunch grabbed an empty mansion in London. It was a case of upscale squatting, the kind that can’t be said to encourage gentrification, and the brazenness of it captivated the media. Graeme Robertson set the scene, writing in The Guardian:

It is one of London’s most exclusive addresses. Michelin-starred restaurants are just a block away, the US embassy is around the corner and Hyde Park is at the end of the road. To share the same postcode ought to cost millions. But the new residents of 18 Upper Grosvenor Street, a raggle-taggle of teenagers and artists called the Da! collective, haven’t paid a penny for their £6.25m, six-storey townhouse in Mayfair. The black anarchist flag flapping from the first-floor balcony gives a clue what they are up to: since finding a window open on the first floor on October 10, the group has been squatting in the house, and only plan to leave when evicted. This might take some time: after almost a month, the deed owner — a company called Deltaland Resources Ltd, according to the Land Registry — doesn’t appear to have noticed that the once-opulent building has been taken over.

● *His Michelin-starred restaurant was directly opposite a squat*

The 30-plus rooms of the grade II-listed residence are now scattered with sleeping bags, mattresses, rucksacks spilling over with clothes and endless half-finished art installations. One room is full of tree branches while another hosts a pink baby bath above which dangle test tubes filled with capers. They had been watching the building for “at least six months” before they decided to try moving in, said one member, Stephanie Smith, 21. “We had put tape on the keyhole and kept looking through the letter box to see if anyone had been there.” Then, one October night, five of them decided to go in. Some wore high-visibility jackets to look like builders; Smith had a clipboard and fur coat. They propped their rented ladder up against the front of the building, and one man climbed on to the balcony.

“I went across to the window and I couldn’t believe it when it was unlocked,” said the squatter, who declined to give his name. “It was a really exciting moment.”

Almost a month since the occupation began, no one from Deltaland Resources Ltd, which is registered in the British Virgin Islands, has been in touch. Meanwhile the locks have been changed. The Da! group has reconnected the utilities and says the bills will be paid. Smith insists they have done nothing wrong. “Squatting is not a criminal offence, it’s a civil matter,” she said. “If the owners want to kick us out they will have to apply for an eviction notice. If anything, we are improving the building by mending leaks and things like that.”

The group has had a mixed reception from the other residents of Upper Grosvenor Street. “Our next-door neighbours have been really nice; they’ve even let us use their wireless internet,” said Smith. Another neighbour, a man called Alexander, has offered the services of a cook. But not everyone is happy. Jacques De-jardin, manager of a restaurant run by Michelin-starred chef Richard Corrigan, which was due to open last night, was horrified to discover this week it was directly opposite a squat.

“It’s rather bewildering. When you move into an address like this you don’t expect to have squatters as neighbours,” De-jardin said. He needn’t worry about the squatters popping in for dinner, though: they are firm devotees of freecycling and collect all their food from supermarket skips....

At: guardian.co.uk/society/2008/nov/07/mayfair-property-art-squat

The Da! collective named themselves after a sign on the storefront window. [See photo] They further cemented their media credentials by hosting the kind of fabulous dissolute parties that are a mythical part of the London city image. Moreover, the project was, writes the Ravish London blog:

...the realisation of an artistic vision, in the creation of a small piece of London Art history.

For with one push, MADA! the brainchild of artist Simon McAndrew was born. McAndrew an artist in his twenties (click here for photo) had previously lived in Paris working as a hairdresser.. There he came across Chez Robert an art squat located in the centre of the city. At Chez Robert he met and fell in love with his future long-term partner Bogna. Together they decided, after a short stint in Japan, and having moved to London in 2002 to create a London equivalent of Chez Robert. In 2005 they found their first place, a 6 storey building on Kensington High Street. Here they formed what they called the the DA! collective Although the name has favourable associations with Dadaism, a surrealist artistic movement from the 1920s, it was derived from two letters left on the shop front of the building they squatted. McAndrew explained, “On the front windows were the words ‘closing down sale last day’, but by the time we got to it the letters were peeling off and all

that was left were the letters DA.” McAndrew and his partner lived in the building for a year, converting it into an exhibition space and making a cinema in the basement. They attracted more people into the collective including long-standing member Stephanie Smith and went on to find sites in Knightsbridge and Tottenham Court Road before finding their Mayfair spot.

● ‘Closing down sale last day’

On gaining entry to the Mayfair mansion at 18 Upper Grosvenor Street the collective were to find thirty rooms, a large lobby area and a beautiful wooden spiral staircase, which led to the top of the property. The property had no carpets or furnishings, but did have chandeliers and luxuriantly thick curtains hanging from ten foot windows. 18 Upper Grosvenor Street was one of many Georgian town houses built for the aristocracy at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was built and owned by the Grosvenor Estate and Duke of Westminster. Apparently at the time the collective moved in the Grosvenor Estate had leased it to a company based in the British Virgin Islands. The leaseholders, apparently, whilst paying for the lease, did not have an immediate use for it. This may seem unusual but it has been said companies commonly purchase and sell leases on Mayfair properties as part of tax avoidance schemes, meaning several of Mayfair’s properties are empty at any one time....

At: ravishlondon.com/dacollective/index.html#mada

The party was a hit. In another Ravish post –

In general, the atmosphere in this dusty old dark mansion was relaxed and chilled. Punters were sitting down in groups chatting, and supping beers, whilst art student types and designers moved around the building with grace, affecting an air of wonderment and enchantment, with their Gucci handbags hanging from shoulder. The audience was a mix of middle class trendies and poverty stricken crusties.... Heleena wrote, “I was immediately immersed into a labyrinth of video art installations and performance arty stuff. Behind every door there was a surprise: looming abstract sculptures, an unbelievably loud jam session that was actually on the fourth floor but sounded like it was right next to me, some impossible-to-deconstruct experimental films... London’s preview whores rubbed shoulders with tweedy Mayfair locals, squat party frequenters and journos, who wondered around silently taking pictures.”

At: ravishlondon.com/dacollective/index.html#madashow8thnovember2008

Sometime later, the leaders of the squat talked to Tallulah Berry of Libertine Magazine:

Da! is an ongoing series of exhibitions and events in unused commercial buildings in central London. DA! began in 2005 when Simon and Bogna McAndrew squatted no.43 Kensington

High Street. Simon and Bogna live in Chelsea with their daughters Dahlia and Poppy. (Bogna tells me ‘Our daughter is called Dahlia from Da! We wanted to include Da! In the name because I was pregnant with her when we were living in Kensington High St). They met in Paris and have been married for eight years.

Let’s begin at the beginning, how did Da! start?

It started in Paris. I was working as a hairdresser there when I came across this group called Chez Robert. Three guys had turned a huge building in the centre of Paris over to artists and the public. People always talk about the Parisians as being quite insular and how hard it is being a stranger there but I found this was the complete opposite. This was a social place, somewhere you could go and meet people, make friends. It gave me great opportunities, for example I learnt hairdressing and I also met my wife. I was inspired by my experience in Paris and my wife and I wanted to recreate it in London. We found Kensington High St and went from there.

Would you say that Da! stands for rebellion against the current art world? Is it related to the Dada movement?

There is an obvious connection. When we chose the name Da! we were conscious of an association with Dada. However, Da! actually came from some letters that were on the window of Kensington High St. On the front windows were the words ‘closing down sale last day’, but by the time we got to it the letters were peeling off and all that was left were the letters DA. There is something nice about people creating their own associations. There is an abstract element to that.

Would you still associate it with rebellion against the current art world? A break away from conformity?

Err...when I started Da! I wasn’t really clued up about art. It wasn’t a rebellion, as I didn’t have an idea about what the art world stood for. So it was just a way to express.



The DA! Collective named themselves after a scrap of signage on the storefront window of their 2008 squat in Mayfair, Westminster, London.

Do you think the constant moving of location helps to inspire the creative process?

The Da! manifesto states 'DA! is not tied to a physical location, it is therefore extremely important that a sense of continuation is achieved through time'. Thinking about an answer to this question I can't help thinking about my childhood...

What is it that appeals to people?

I think it is rebellion and freedom; wanton abandon.

Is it that crazy?

Yes. I would say unpleasantly so....

Is it mainly young people or a big mixture who get involved with Da!? (Bogna enters the conversation, turns on the webcam and waves)

Bogna: The younger you are the less responsibility you have so you are freer to spend all your time in the squat. We did attract young people. That was sometimes irritating. It was like having to play mummy and daddy before we had children. We always took responsibility for them, role models to them, telling them what to do. That's my worst memory actually. The people who were immature. They were young in the mind not young in age.

Why? Do they treat it like a party?

They are not really thinking about how they could use the building they tend to be just hanging around. Sometimes we

needed help and there was no one to help you and then from ten to three am they are having a party.

What kind of difficulties have you come across, police?

The police were really lovely and supportive. They even visited the gallery. Early on the police did turn up en masse, just after the London bombings. When we first began squatting in Kensington High St the neighbours called the police. We showed them that we lived there and they were OK about it. We tried not to cause any problems. We have a no drug policy so if we saw someone taking drugs we would ask them to leave....

If you could choose any building in London to occupy and turn into an exhibit which one would it be?

Simon: I like the question and think it is exactly the right way to look at what we do. I would say Battersea power station. It's not only the building that you have to take into consideration. You have to think 'How it might be used?' not necessarily 'How it will be used?' What is also crucial are the people. I wouldn't want Battersea Power Station to myself, it would be nice to have it with a group of people.

Do you think that Da! is about sharing art, as being an artist can be a very isolated occupation?

Simon: It is about sharing and community. The biggest joy is to have an empty building and fill it up with as much as we can....

At: libertine-magazine.com/home/2010/11/21/the-founders-of-da-collective/



"Keep your coins. I want change," by Banksy

The History of 59 Rivoli

The “Chez Robert” squat discussed by the Mayfair squatters today is legalized as studio space at 59 Rivoli. Their history is posted on their website.

In the Beginning...

On 1 November 1999, known as “Festival of the Dead” day, the KGB (Kalex, Gaspard, Bruno), managed to open up the cemented-over door of 59 rue de Rivoli in Paris. The building had been abandoned by the Crédit Lyonnais and the French state for 15 years. A dozen artists showed up to lend a hand in the clean up of the place which was a mess – full of dead pigeons, syringes, rubble, etc. The purpose of this operation was threefold:

1. Revive an unused empty place
2. Create a place for artists to create, live and expose [their work]
3. Prove the validity of a cultural alternative

The group thus formed was called “Chez Robert, Electron Libre.” They organized show openings, performances, concerts and opened the building to the public daily from 1:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The French state made a complaint against the artists and they were scheduled to be evicted on February 4, 2000. Thanks to the diligence of their lawyer, Florence Diffre, they got a delay of six months on their eviction. The press became very interested in the phenomenon “squat” (a contraction of squat and art) and, forced by the media, the government didn’t pursue that matter for several years.

Some leaders of political parties came out publicly in favor of the artist squatters. The DAP (Délégation aux Arts Plastiques) supported “Chez Robert, Electron Libre” in a report about the “movement,” a report commissioned by the Ministry of Culture. However, the situation of the squat in the Rue de Rivoli remained precarious as they awaited the eviction.

The most important political alliance was from Bertrand Delanoë, the present mayor of Paris. Delanoë has been mayor of Paris since 18 March 2001, when control of the city council was won by a left-wing alliance for the first time since the 1871 Paris Commune. During his campaign, Delanoë came through the squat, loved the place and promised

that if he were elected mayor, he would legalize the squat so that the artists would have a place to work without worrying about being thrown out. And Monsieur le Mayor kept his promise!!

After the winter (November 2000 – March 2001), during which time evictions are usually “frozen”, the group awaited the results of municipal elections in Paris to see what their fate would be. The political victory of the left allowed artists to get a reprieve. The newly appointed deputy of culture, Christophe Girard, undertook the task of doing everything possible to prevent the eviction of the artists at 59 rue de Rivoli. A report by the Ministry of Culture said that, with 40,000 visitors a year, the Chez Robert Electron Libre squat had become the third most visited center of contemporary art in Paris.

This started a second wave of media coverage on the movement making the expulsions of the squat of artists “politically problematic.” Riding on the waves created by this media attention, the collective Chez Robert Electron Libre wrote a project entitled “L’Essaim d’Art” (“The swarm of art”) and sent it to Remy Bovis, appointed by the City of Paris to be “in charge of the squats” (a new government post!).

● Monsieur le Mayor kept his promise!!

Six months later, the news came during an interview in Figaroscope with Bertrand Delanoë: the City of Paris would purchase the building on Rue de Rivoli for the French government in order to ensure that the building was safe and that the project “L’Essaim d’Art,” slightly amended, was feasible. The legalization process of the squat had begun. In order to acquire a legal standing and, in hopes of signing a future “occupancy agreement” with the City of Paris, the collective Chez Robert Free Electron formed an association and took the name of “59 Rivoli.”

The building was closed to the public on 28 March 2006. The artists were then relocated by the city of Paris to a temporary location in the 9th arrondissement while the building at 59 rue de Rivoli was completely renovated and brought up to code. In September 2009, the artists were back in 59 Rivoli and the doors were once again open to the public. A three year renewable contract had been signed by the city of Paris and the association “59 Rivoli.”

“L’ESSAIM D’ART”

In May 2001, the collective Chez Robert Electron Libre presented... this proposal:

• A Site for Contemporary Creation

“59 Rivoli” is, first of all, a place of 30 artist studios. The shortage of work areas for artists in Paris is a fact recognized both by the different administrations, the media and the artists themselves. The creation (or rather legalization) of 30 artists’ studios in the heart of Paris is not a luxury but a necessity in terms of cultural policy.

• Formula “Artists’ Studios Open to the Public”

Open six days a week from 13h to 20h, this formula has generated popular enthusiasm of tens of thousands of visitors each year, the 59 Rivoli having become one of the three most visited sites of contemporary art in Paris, one of the ten most visited places in France.

This is a real cultural alternative way to present art that allows for a more democratic access to the creation, for

both the artists and the public. Many of today’s interesting and talented artists are often left out of the system (galleries, magazines, museums, etc.) and, therefore, out of the public eye. For the public, this alternative allows them free access to “live” art and the actual artists. It’s an opportunity to meet the artist, and to see inside the studio where and how the work is created. This closer link between contemporary art and the public also serves to improve the image of contemporary art which is often thought of as elitist and contemptuous vis-à-vis the general public.

The 59 Rivoli also offers the possibility for artists outside the association to present their works to the public. Not only are there 20 permanently installed artists but also 10 studios are reserved for residencies of three to six months for artists, local or from abroad, to promote international exchange and a multicultural experience. Spaces are also available for the performing arts for music rehearsals, preparing a show etc.

At 59rivoli-eng.org/history.html



The facade show at 59 Rue de Rivoli from 2001-04, by Bibi (plastic containers, lights)

Contaminating the University, Creating Autonomous Knowledge:

Occupied Social and Cultural Centers in Italy An Interview with Claudia Bernardi

by Class War University

CW: Could you tell me how you got involved in radical organizing and what kind of organizing you've done?

CLAUDIA: I got involved in radical organizing when I was a teenager, above all after the experiences we had in Mexico with the Zapatista movement and then Genoa in 2001 [G8 protests]. Inside the proliferation of radical organizing in the so-called “nogloba” movement, I became part of a collective that since 2001 defined the concept of “living knowledge” as a theoretical tool to analyze the transformation of labor and knowledge production [see De Nicola A., Do P., “Quella strana fabbrica di saperi che produce solo precari” in Posse, Il Lavoro di Genova, ManifestoLibri, 2001]. Beyond our political work in the university we decided to occupy a space outside of the university. The basic thinking was that the university is a productive space for students who are already workers inside it—they produce knowledge and cooperation that is not recognized. At the same time, students are productive outside the university—they do precarious work and they deeply use their knowledge outside the university. So, there is a strict connection between these two spaces of production: even in those universities that seem bound by their campuses, actually the border collapsed in the face of a strong overlapping between the university and metropolis. So, we occupied a private space with undergrad students, PhD students, and precarious workers of the 3rd sector – to transform it into a free, independent one.

We occupied a space immediately outside of the university, a student district that was at the same time the object of a huge gentrification process, and was inhabited by migrants and artists too. We were in the middle of the material production outside the campus, but with a strong connection within the university. In fact, we were in the social center we called ESC, an autonomous atelier, (Eccedi Sottrai Crea – Exceed, Subtract, Create), but at the same time occupiers animate different autonomous assemblies in most of the colleges of the university. In this sense, we always have a tight connection and exchange from one space to the other. It was basically aimed to cross the border of the university, to share knowledge in an

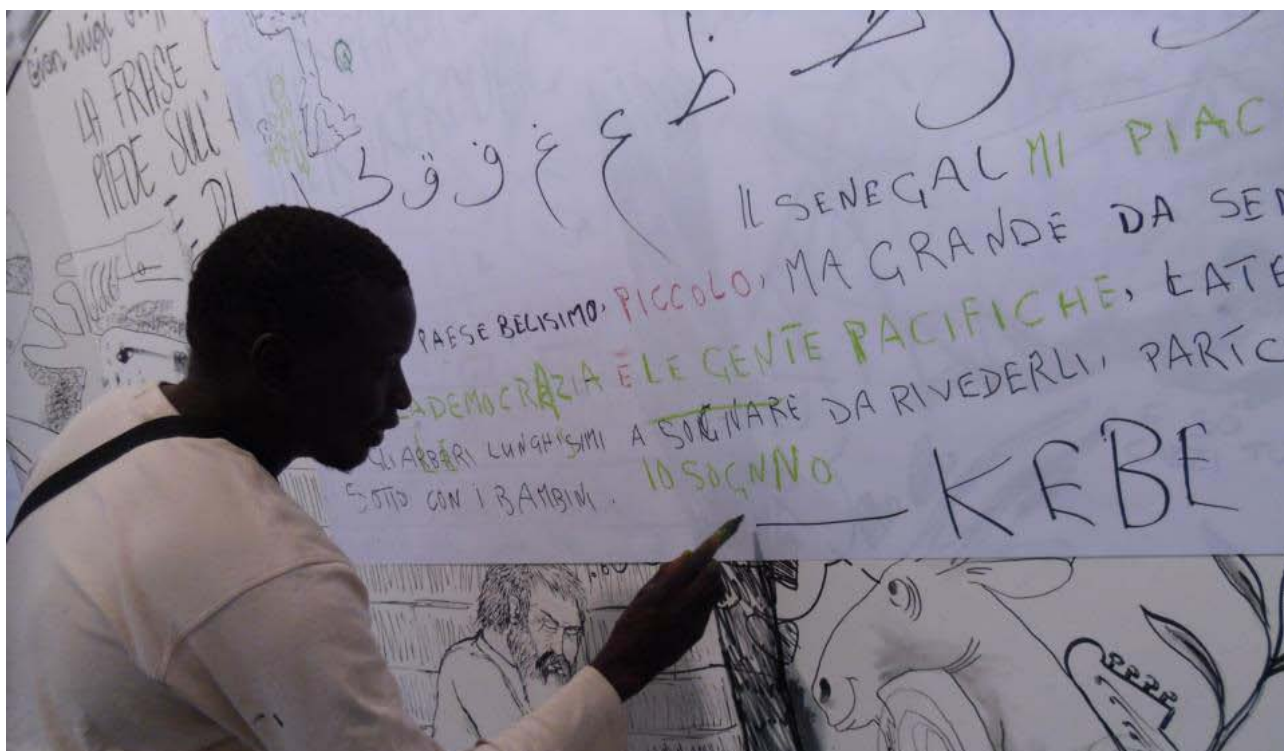
independent way, and at the same time, to contaminate the academy and their form of knowledge production.

CW: Could you say more about the kinds of connections that this social center has created between students and people off-campus—migrants and precarious workers? How have the informal networks of cooperation and community amongst migrants and workers connected with student organizing through that space?

Claudia: There are two levels of the discourse. One is related to the students inside and outside the university, and inside and outside ESC. The other is about migrants, because access to the university is closed for most of them, but, at the same time, they are medium or high skilled: often they have a degree, but it is not recognized in Italy. So, there is always a gap between these two conditions of precarity of life.

● *It was basically aimed to cross the border of the university*

The connection between students and migrants takes place mainly inside ESC. But, we always try to build up activities and discussions even in the university, about immigration laws and migrants' work. In ESC, we offer a front-office of free legal help for migrants and a free Italian language school where we do not ask for money, documents or Visas: these projects are led by undergrads, PhD students and social workers. At the same time, we try to involve migrants, who find help in ESC, with our activities in the university. For example, we had a course of self-education about the post-colonial condition, borders and knowledge production where migrants were the researchers inside this course. Moreover, we have completely reversed the role of the educator and the educated. During 1st March of 2010, we organized a “Lesson of alien illegality” in front of the Parliament to protest against both the reform of education and immigration: refugees from Afghanistan or other countries and illegal aliens did a public lesson about their condition in Italy.



Learning wall, part of the Draftsmen Congress at ESC in Rome.

Then, a recent example of this crossing border organizing could be the Draftsmen Congress [www.solidarityaction.istitutovizzero.it] based in ESC atelier, in cooperation with the 7. Berlin Biennale of Art. We transformed ESC into a white, empty space, where people could enter, take colors or pencils and draw or write on the walls: in this way the boundary between artist and observer collapsed. We did a lesson of the Italian language school on the wall of ESC, using the images and drawings as a process of knowledge production, shared with their teachers who are students of the university. In this way, the learning of language escapes from the vertical relation between teacher and student, the language itself became less of a border, and more part of the same process of redefinition of knowledge and learning.

● *The redefinition of knowledge production is at the core of this project*

Of course, creating connection with migrants is really hard, because they are not only coming from various countries but they lived in different condition: sometimes they are researchers from Asia, others are careworkers from South America or cleaners from South Africa. So, the redefinition of knowledge production, outside of any charitable approach, is at the core of these kind of projects.

Radical organizing in ESC is led mainly by PhD and undergraduate students. One of the most important tools to link ESC and

the academy is the proliferation of political debate and creation of activities for and with students and precarious workers. Our bodies always move between the university and our atelier, and that's very important, because the aim of ESC, to cross the border of the academy, is always renewed by different persons of various skills coming and leaving, debating and organizing.

The first places for radical organizing are the self-managed assemblies: they are autonomous from the political projects of ESC, even because inside the university the condition of students is much more heterogeneous and it's not politically defined. There are students from other leftist experiences and not part of the autonomy/post-operaist tradition we refer to, so the assemblies are the place of organization of living knowledge inside and against the academy. Then, because of the last education reforms, tuition and fees are much higher than before, so students have to finish the university very quickly. So, ESC is more stable from the point of view of the circulation of people, while the university is much more moveable and differentiated in time.

The relationship between radical organizing at the university and in ESC is the common production of autonomous knowledge. Inside the university, self-education takes place in a completely independent way, but at the same time, when we do our seminars inside the experience of Free Metropolitan University (LUM; www.lumproject.org) in ESC, they are attended by students who build up self-education seminars inside the university as well. On the one hand, four faculty — humanities, political science, philosophy, and medicine —

develop every year self-education seminars about different topics connected with their studies (e.g., art and language production, new conceptual understanding of the global crisis, immaterial workers and political economy, etc.)

● *The concept of “tumult,” a Machiavellian figure that links turmoil, revolts with the production of institutions*

In LUM’s seminars, since 2005, we work on different topics, defining every year a central concept to rethink and analyse transformations of the present: marxian lexicon; the role of passions inside capitalism; gentrification process inside the metropolis; the exploitation of the body inside the biopolitical framework; the relation between property, expropriation, and the common. One year ago we analysed the concept of “tumult,” a Machiavellian figure that links turmoil, revolts with the production of institutions: it is a constituent process that connects together the institutions, new production of norms and the tumult, the revolts: it is not a division between spontaneity and organization, but rather it is a constituent process.

The seminar is a place where the academic division between professor and students dissolve, a place of transdisciplinary connection among fields of study and various analytical languages. We always try to create common knowledge in different spaces in which students are autonomous to decide what they want to study, discuss, and share.

Resistance within the Global Crisis: Creating Common Institutions Inside and Outside the University

CW: What sort of relationship with the university have you worked out through ESC and these autonomous seminars? Do students get credit for doing the self-education seminars in the university? Then, a broader question: seeing ESC and the Free Metropolitan University as a kind of autonomous university—that is not part of the education system and that doesn’t put students in competition for those grades and credits and discipline them as capitalist subjects—how do you view the relationship between this autonomous, anti-capitalist university and the capitalist university? Do you see a kind of ‘engaged withdrawal’ relationship between them?

CLAUDIA: The self-education seminars took place inside the university, they are inside and they are against trying to build up common and independent spaces. Briefly, self-education is a tool and dispositif [device] of organization: it’s very important because if we think about self-education outside of the organization of conflict, it just becomes a counter-course or a free seminar, but that is not what we do. People who become involved in self-education understand that it is possible to do politics in-

side of the university and against the factory of knowledge. In immaterial production there can be independent, autonomous, anti-capitalist politics, able to organize and self-manage their learning; they are the living knowledge. We have to understand the difference between the topics and issues’ potential either to be conflictive—to be autonomous and to be a tool of organization—or an anti-capitalist topic, at the same time, could be a part of the academy, of the same capitalist production.

Self-education is an organizational dispositif. When we do a self-education seminar, we ask for credits inside the university as a sabotage able to balance the power in our favor. “UniCommon. The revolt of living knowledge”, is a network of nearly ten cities that every year do self-education seminars all around Italy. But, in the last two years, the so-called reforms of education are basically destroying and erasing issues and languages. For this reason, self-education and autonomous spaces are much more important now, to fight against the destruction of education and culture. Self-education now is a place of resistance, and at the same time it is a space of creation of common institutions inside of the university. In these common spaces, we try to build up an autonomous university—the common institution of knowledge.

On the contrary, LUM’s seminars do not give or ask for credits because it is completely another experiment: it’s really a Free Metropolitan University, much more a space of militant research. So, we try to grasp and develop new conceptual tools to understand the transformation that we are living. Through having all these debates inside the Free Metropolitan University, we also try to contaminate the university itself. The production of knowledge inside the global crisis, I think, in Italy at least, changed completely; the modes of teaching and learning have become much more controlled, disciplined and over-simplified. There is a process of impoverishment, a huge attack to culture and knowledge.

● *“UniCommon. The revolt of living knowledge”*

An Autonomous Study Center for the Common Alternative: Connecting Political Organization with Knowledge Production

CW: With ESC and other movements you’re involved in, how do you define your relationship with the universities as they are being attacked by the state, while also trying to create something different and resist the traditional model of universities? It seems like you have multiple points of conflict. How do you situate your project in relation to those different points of critique—the traditional universities and the state with its austerity measures?

CLAUDIA: Of course, the crisis worsened the situation, but even before the austerity measures there was an ongoing process of the destruction of the university under the label of Bologna

Process. The last movements in Italy, in particular in 2005 and 2008, were basically student movements claiming free education, autonomous spaces, welfare against precarity and a common self-reform of the university. The government attacked us heavily: we were called children, we were being told we were not capable of building up our own lives, not to be researchers, so, we had to migrate or, as the Minister of Welfare told us, ‘you need to do manual work’. It’s just the evidence of their intention to close the university as a space of knowledge production, to discipline and control students, as paradigmatic figure of the contemporary workforce, by building up new borders within the university, they aim to establish which are the preferable figures of labor: precarious, removable, passive and exploited.

● *It’s an autonomous study center for the common*

Of course, this scenario is very difficult and this heavy attack is addressed towards all those persons who produce knowledge, not only students or researchers, but artists, performers and technicians too. In fact, in the last years several theaters and cinemas have been occupied to rethink this kind of production and sociality outside of the “expertise” but together with figures living in the metropolis (families, students, migrants...)

A second level is trying to escape from the nationalistic and eurocentric approach of Italian university. So we constantly improve our transnational connections, working with activists and researchers across Europe and Mediterranean space, both sharing radical organizing tools and practices, for example Book Bloc that spread beyond Italy in the last two years.

Then, the problem of the fight with the academy is basically over the new borders that they establish using citizenship, debt, language, deskilling processes. We are facing a lack of immaterial production inside of the university. For this reason, we tried to connect with other experiences, like social centers, radio stations, and even projects that involve squats of migrants. One example could be our effort to build up an independent center of study, self-financed by ESC and other social centres, part of the union of factory workers, an independent Italian newspaper and associations. Throughout this relationship between students and precarious workers and the factory workers, we built this new experience. It’s an autonomous study center for the common.

Occupied Cinemas and Theaters: Culture as a Common Good

CW: So, it sounds like having those occupied spaces as a place for people to meet and to have debates seems very important for building connections and coming up with shared political knowledge that can guide organizing. Do

you feel like these occupations are happening more often now? Is this a tactic that’s been spreading in Italy?

CLAUDIA: In the last year, there were several occupations of theaters and cinemas all over Italy. There is a kind of network of independent spaces for culture. In the past year, there are two examples in Rome that are worth speaking about. The first one is Nuovo Cinema Palazzo, a very old cinema, where the local government recently decided to build a casino there. So, all the population organized—there are even comrades of ESC squatting there, and migrants and even residents of 70, 80 years old, migrants, several artists and care workers. After one year of struggle, occupiers have been recognized as a ‘multitude’ by the same court—as a multitude of people resisting against the casino and as legitimate to take back the place. Now, there are several independent projects: theater, performances, children’s activities, a free room for study—libraries in La Sapienza are open for only three hours a day now, and they are going to be completely closed from September—language courses, spaces for migrants.

It’s really a heterogeneous space and we are creating knowledge about ‘what is an occupation of a cultural space?’ What does it mean to, not only defend culture and to resist the attacks of the government, but to create a new way of the production of culture? That’s the main antidote to the attacks of the government.

The second one is Teatro Valle. It’s the oldest theater in Rome, built in 1727. It was going to be closed, so a group of artists decided to occupy it—developing a common way to build up a common constitution through a large process of definition of new norms to organize and manage the space, affirming theatre as an institution of the common. They are finding out a new way, inside and against the Italian law, to create new norms that legitimate the space as part of ‘commons’. To build up these open spaces, we had several debates to create that status with the lawyer, philosophers, journalists, and all the artists. They wrote this statute that is free and available to be modified on the website, and after months, they are collecting all the advice from people and raising funds to create a foundation. They are producing law “from below” and, at the same time, they are creating anomalous norms that will be available for everybody.

CW: It’s amazing to hear about artists being so politically active. In those occupations, are the artists and cultural workers taking on leading roles in organizing the occupations? Here in the US, there’s often a division of labor in movements between art work and organizing work. It sounds here like the roles of artists and organizers kind of integrate together. Do you feel that’s been an important part of the movement?

CLAUDIA: About the composition of these occupations, they are very heterogeneous and managed by a general assembly that takes place one day a week and they manage all the

occupations from the political, theoretical level to the organizational one. In ESC, there is no division inside the space, because we worked a lot in the last ten years to not divide the theoretical production from the practical one. So, we avoid dividing the intellectuals and the people that manage the space: nobody can create a separated assembly, a separated group, or to divide the work inside the autonomous spaces.

● *They are producing law “from below”*

Of course, above all in the occupied theaters, at the beginning it was very difficult, because some of the artists had often individualistic attitudes and little attitude to build up together a common space. So, they decided to give less importance to the individual, but to create a shared understanding of what kind of discourse we have to develop to understand what we are doing. That's why they discussed a lot about common institutions: what does it mean to share knowledge—to build up something different? To fight capitalistic production of culture within society?

So, they focused on what we have in common: why we are here and what we can develop all together—putting aside our individual status and trying to understand how to multiply our work inside this place and how to address our cultural production with the others in the city and national level. That's why other occupations of artists and cultural workers took place, from Palermo to Milan to Venice. So, now there is a kind of network that connects these spaces. And we tried on the transnational, European level to enlarge it. So, before going to Frankfurt [for Blockupy Frankfurt – May 16-19, 2012], we did a caravan from Athens to Frankfurt, going through Romania and Serbia and across Eastern Europe, trying to meet all the people involved with other occupations of theaters and cinemas.

Migrant Struggles within and against Changing Borders and Frontiers

CW: Could I ask you a question about your own research on migrant struggles? I know there's a ton you could say about it, but I'm interested to hear how you negotiate the tensions between doing research, being an academic, while also being a political organizer. How do you bring together your organizing work with your academic work? How do you try to connect migrant struggles in the Americas with struggles in Italy?

CLAUDIA: I have always been interested, from the personal point of view, about transformation in the Americas, above all in Central America, in particular the border between the US and Mexico. Why? First of all, there are lots of similarities between the Americas and Europe, especially in the last

ten years. Simplifying it a lot, the spatial and hierarchical tool in the Americas was the frontier, while in Europe it was the border. In recent years, due to militarization and new forms of capitalistic accumulation we have seen how these two tools, in my opinion, are overlapping, both in the Americas and in Europe. Above all, we are facing it in the last three years, with the global crisis, when the aggressive attack of capitalism shaped itself as an internal colonialism within European borders: the role of Germany in Greece's crisis and its financial and economical attack is paradigmatic.

But, I started my dissertation about the border between Arizona and Sonora, with the proposal of SB1070, which is very similar to a law they introduced in Italy: a huge criminalization of migrants inside the national space. At the same time, in Arizona and other states, they are banning Mexican-American Studies, Chicano Studies, and Ethnic Studies. In Tucson, they already started banning them from the high schools. This is a huge attack on difference, on migrants of several generations, and on culture, through an intense racialization process that involve language, skill and knowledge production. I think that here it is very similar—with all the specific differences we have in Italy—that we are facing a huge attack on culture and education. You never find a second-generation migrant in Italy teaching inside the university. Yet, there is a huge proliferation of

November 20, 7-9pm
Artists Discussion:
Art and Revolt

Sublevarte Colectivo
Retrospective: 1999-2012
November 16- December 31, 2012
Opening Reception:
Friday, November 16, 2012, 7-10pm
Artist Presentation at 8:30pm

Sublevarte Colectivo is an artist collective born of the 1999 student strikes in Mexico City. They bring their graphic street interventions to the archive, with an installation highlighting the various social movements and uprisings in which they have participated and supported. This includes work with the Zapatistas, the flower sellers of Atenco, the striking teachers of Oaxaca, amongst others.

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cultural production, of fictions, of articles, of essays from second-generation migrants in an independent way.

The compromise is that my topic in Italy is completely outside of the academy. So, the first compromise was with language—to study in other languages from different fields of study, and to try, from the immaterial point of view, to escape from the organization of knowledge of the Italian academy. Of course, I have adopted a lot the Anglo-american way of organized knowledge, but I was contaminated with the Mexican and the South American one. So, my first fight inside the academy is from the research point of view. I crossed different methodologies, but also different hierarchies of knowledge organization. I think it's important to provincialize, not only Italy, and not only Europe, but above all the Western knowledge organization.

● *I have adopted a lot the Anglo-American way of organized knowledge*

Basically, I am trying through self-education to introduce the issue on which I work inside the university. So, I organized some seminars about the post-colonial condition that I think is really connected with the colonial experience between Mexico and the US, and all the theories of internal colonization and border studies. In Europe, there is a wide definition of borders now, the internal ones: the modification of the Schengen agreement—it can be suspended for six months—means to divide North and South Europe. It means that the knowledge production, the sharing, and the definition of what a migrant is, is really influenced by all these transformations.

Finally, I try to establish connections with professors to use the large spaces in their courses. Of course, I have a scholarship, otherwise I would never support free work in the university, even for a few hours. So, I try to enlarge the space of debate about these topics, from a political point of view, teaching and sharing with students what a border is, how a border is defined inside our society, and to establish connections between the US-Mexico border and the upcoming borders in Europe and even the old ones. It's interesting how we can find lots of similarities in these spaces, and how students realize how the reforms and laws that are being approved in Italy were addressed to create new borders and to define what "a migrant is", a stigma marked on them: now we are once and for all migrants, above all European students inside the same Europe.

REFERENCES

– posted September 2012 at classwaru.org/2012/09/24/contaminating...

Occupy Oakland Liberates Shuttered Library

Oakland, California, August 2012

The building unveiled today as the Victor Martinez Community Library was part of a Carnegie Foundation endowment of four libraries given to the city of Oakland between 1916 and 1918. Oakland's librarian at the time, Charles S. Greene, believed that the city's people would benefit most from libraries placed within their communities.

Despite this vision, the building was one of seven branch casualties of budget cuts in the late seventies, severing vital library life-lines in poor and working communities. From the early 70s until the late 80s, this building was a school created during the Chicano Movement called the Emiliano Zapata Street academy. Since then, the "Latin American Branch" library building located at the corner of Miller and 15th st. has mostly sat empty, despite the fact that the next nearest library is miles away, and increasingly difficult to access in a city like Oakland with an increasingly expensive transit system. With its eroding chain link fence and decaying, armored exterior, the building is much more than an eyesore; the unused, but inaccessible, space creates a life-draining dark vacuum of stability that serves at best as a convenient place for the unscrupulous to dump their old mattresses, couches and assorted garbage.

This morning, a group of activists opened this building again for use as a library. Inside is the modest seed for a library and community center—hundreds of books donated by people who envision the rebirth of local, community-owned libraries and social and political centers throughout Oakland. We've named the building after recently deceased author, Victor Martinez, who overcame a young life of hard agricultural work to become a successful writer in the Bay Area. His semi-autobiographical novel, *Parrot in the Oven*, has become a seminal work of the Latino experience. Martinez died last year at 56 of an illness caused by his work in the fields.

If you live in this community, we only ask that you think about how you can use this building. Name it anything

you like. Purpose it to any goal that benefits the community—library, social or political neighborhood center. All we ask is that you consider keeping it out of the hands of a city which will only seal the fence and doors again, turning the space back into an aggregator of the city's trash and a dark hole in the middle of an embattled community. The doors here are open. And there are many others simply waiting to be.

The Victor Martinez Library was quickly evicted, and police maintained a 24-hour lockdown on the neighborhood to prevent its reoccupation. Activists set up a library on the street outside. An update on the ongoing efforts to organize this biblioteca was posted late August at: indybay.org/newsitems/2012/08/28/18720431.php; and early September at kalw.org/post/people-s-library-continues-despite-city-crackdown. More info: Biblioteca Popular Victor Martinez on Facebook.



Members of Colectivo Situaciones from Buenos Aires discuss militant research projects in the time of crisis at Interference Archive in Brooklyn.

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